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THE
ASIATIC SOCIETY OF BOMBAY
Town Hall, Bombay.

SPORT AND POLITICS

UNDER

AN EASTERN SKY

Photo by Metcalfe, Richmond, Yorkshire.

THE AUTHOR.

SPORT AND POLITICS

UNDER

AN EASTERN SKY

BY

THE EARL OF RONALDSHAY

F.R.G.S.

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"The earth was made so various that the mind
Of desultory man, studious of change
And pleased with novelty, might be indulged."
—WILLIAM COWPER: *The Task.*

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INTRODUCTION.

One of the features of the latter half of the nineteenth century was undoubtedly to be found in the extraordinary facilities for travel which sprang into existence with the subdual of steam and electricity, enabling enormous numbers of people to journey with speed and comfort over the whole of the civilised globe. Countless lines of ocean-going steamers, vast networks of iron ways, rivers and inland seas converted into highways for the use of man, canals, post-roads, cables, and telegraph wires have gone far to bring even the remote corners of other continents into close communication with our own. But despite all such girding of the earth, evolution to a great extent of the worship of speed characteristic of the present day, there still remain some few secluded nooks — few and far between, perhaps, and scattered sparsely over the whole earth's surface — which, thanks either to natural physical features or to the accident of an anomalous political position, are still well out of reach of a Cook's tourist ticket; and there are probably few

occasions on which the heart of the sport- and adventure-loving Briton throbs so wildly or leaps with quite the same thrill of delirious exhilaration as it does when he is on the point of leaving behind him the restraint and conventionality of a highly civilised existence, and is actually setting foot on the road to the still unconquered strongholds of Nature.

Choice of direction must of course be left to individual taste; but for myself I plead guilty to being one of those who have succumbed to the alluring spell of the East, whose Circean grip once felt can never be forgotten. Here among the far-stretching regions of Asia, with its hordes of poly-genous races, its wealth and variety of scenery, its wonderful collection of widely diversified religions and customs, may be found worlds to please the most des-ultory of minds, and to cast a charm over the spirit, jaded and wearied with the atmosphere of artificiality which surrounds it as it hurries feverishly along the narrow groove of conventional everyday life.

Here in the lands of the Southern Cross may be found delight in roaming free through the heavy fragrance of a tropical jungle, where vegetation, left to its own sweet will, envelops the earth with a mantle of wild luxuriance, till the soft shades of evening steal silently over the land, when, beneath the shadow perhaps of the temple of some old-world god, the wanderer rests, to conjure up, as he lists to the drowsy hum borne on the scent-laden breath of the tropical night, visions of things inexplicable veiled darkly in the mystic romance of the East.

For him for whom solitude has no charm are cities of wonderful fashion and design, homes of a polyglot crowd of mixed humanity, living pictures possessed of all the glitter and variety of the ever-changing pattern of a kaleidoscope; palaces, temples, tombs, and pinnacles, all monuments of the incomparable art of the East.

In strong contrast, yet possessed also of a certain terrible grandeur, are to be found the burning wastes of yellow sand which stretch unchecked over many parts of Asia, blighting with feverish touch huge areas; deserts forsaken and accursed, on which from a brazen sky a burning sun beats down eternally, and over whose stricken and blistered surfaces a baneful wind, blowing with fiery blast, scorches and withers whatsoever it may chance to meet.

But it is perhaps in the heart of the great lonely mountains, crowned with eternal snows, where before her sublime grandeur the soul of man bows down, that Nature speaks with most emphatic voice. Can any one who has found himself in solitude — that "solitude where we are least alone" — on the side of some hoary peak rising from a great mountain system, whether it be towards evening, when, as

> "The day is done, and the darkness
> Falls from the wings of night,
> As a feather is wafted downwards
> From an eagle in his flight,"[1]

he sinks to rest, his roof the heavens, or whether

[1] Longfellow, "The Day is Done."

it be at that mysterious hour before dawn, when a strange hush seems cast upon the earth, fail to experience

> "A feeling of sadness and longing
> That is not akin to pain,
> And resembles sorrow only
> As the mist resembles rain,"[1]

or to learn from that great teacher Nature that life is more than a toy to be played with at our pleasure, and that we hold it for a purpose to fulfil some minute but none the less important part in the plan of the great Architect of the universe?

It has always appeared to me that though it was in his own heart Prince Gautama Siddhartha eventually found the Truth, yet it was his six years' communing with Nature, his lonely sojourn in the wilderness, that prepared him for the great revelation which in the fulness of time was vouchsafed to him.

Was it not the spirit within that cried for the solitude of Nature, that it might learn wisdom in the contemplation of the hoary mountains, which, calm and unmoved, have watched the rise and fall of nations, and gazed untroubled on the devastating floods which, driven with all the force of the pent-up heat of passion-torn humanity, have from the beginning of all time surged and roared and thundered around them with all the frenzied violence of a tempestuous storm-ridden sea? Was it not the spirit within that cried for the solitude of the great

[1] Longfellow, "The Day is Done."

forest, "where no one comes, where the deer feed and the tiger creeps," in order that under the beneficent teaching of Nature it might acquire that greatest of all knowledge—the knowledge of itself?

And so after his return from the pathless wilderness, prepared, as I like to believe, by his search after wisdom therein, Gautama, the Lord Buddha, found the Light.

In submitting, then, to the public an account of two years' wandering in some of the wild lands of Western Asia, I do so in the hope that it may prove of interest to those who, like myself, delight to roam

"Far from gay cities and the ways of men,"

and in the belief that it will prove of use to sportsmen and travellers who may be in want of information concerning the countries described. If, in addition, it helps to bring to the notice of any who may chance to peruse its pages the vital importance of the part which Great Britain is called upon to play in the Near East, I shall feel more than repaid for the time and trouble which I have devoted to its compilation.

I have purposely omitted any account of life or travel in the better known parts of India, and have devoted this volume entirely to an account of sport and travel in less accessible districts, such as I have pictured above, which accounts for a gap in the narrative between Parts I. and II. of about seven months.

The two parts of the book deal with distinctly different subjects, Part I. being devoted almost entirely to sport, while in giving in Part II. an account of a journey over the recently constructed trade-route between India and Persia across the deserted wastes of Baloochistan, I have touched to some extent upon the political and commercial aspect of affairs. Throughout the entire narrative I have been careful to pay the strictest attention to accuracy, and have preferred to give a true if bald statement of facts rather than to gild over the often, I fear, prosaic account with a cheap veneer of gaudy imagination.

In the latter half of the volume, any opinions to which I may have given expression, though supported to a certain extent by quotations from other writers, are the opinions which I have myself formed after seeing with my own eyes the country and the state of affairs obtaining therein. Much correspondence has appeared quite recently in the public press in connection with the Persian question, both from a Russophile and a Russophobe point of view. For myself I have no particular desire to be classed in either category, believing as I do that any actual alliance with either Russia or Germany would not be to the advantage of Great Britain, who with her colonies should be capable of maintaining her rights without external aid; but I would point out to the impartial observer that those who are perpetually urging us to come to an understanding with Russia can scarcely have asked themselves seriously what

is the value of an agreement with a country whose political code is of the kind which allows and applauds the deeds of a Kaufmann and a Komaroff, while it endeavours to blind its victim with the conciliatory oratory of a Schouvaloff and a De Giers; neither can they have observed the unhealthy state of a political atmosphere vitiated with the contaminating smoke which rises from the sheafs of broken and abortive promises piled high on the altar raised to Muscovite diplomacy.

The illustrations throughout the book, with the exception of the frontispiece and of the portrait of Ram Pershad and the group of actors in the mystery play at Hemis, which latter two are from photographs taken by a native of Kashmir, are reproductions from photographs taken by myself. For permission to make use of the map of Persia, Afghanistan, and Beluchistan, I am indebted to the kindness of the Royal Geographical Society.

In conclusion, my thanks are due to many for that lavish hospitality to strangers for which the East is celebrated, and for valuable assistance throughout my wanderings in Asia; and more especially to his Excellency Lord Curzon of Kedleston, P.C., G.M.S.I., G.M.I.E., Viceroy and Governor-General of India; to Colonel Sir A. Talbot, K.C.I.E., late Resident in Kashmir; to Colonel H. M. Temple, late H.B.M. Consul-General at Meshed; to Colonel G. Chenevix Trench, late H.B.M. Consul for Sistan, now H.B.M. Consul-General at Meshed; to Mr R. Buller Hughes, 1st A.A.G. at Quetta; and last, but not least, to Mr

W. Mitchell, to whose advice and kind assistance I am so largely indebted for the success of my sporting expedition.

To my publisher also my thanks are due for the kindness and courtesy which he has at all times shown me, and also for permission to reproduce in this volume matter which has already appeared in 'Blackwood's Magazine.'

RONALDSHAY.

August 1902.

PART I.

IN PURSUIT OF WILD GAME IN HIGHEST ASIA

"Behold the mountain towering in its pride
With russet robe, and crown of ruddy gold,
And shaggy fringe of copses crimson-dyed
Beneath the glows of sunset; and behold
The great primeval landscape all unrolled
In grandeur of design, though wild and rude:
The gorgeous hues, the outline free and bold,
Unbridled torrent, and impervious wood,
The wilderness untamed."

—WHYTE-MELVILLE, *The Ark*.

CHAPTER I.

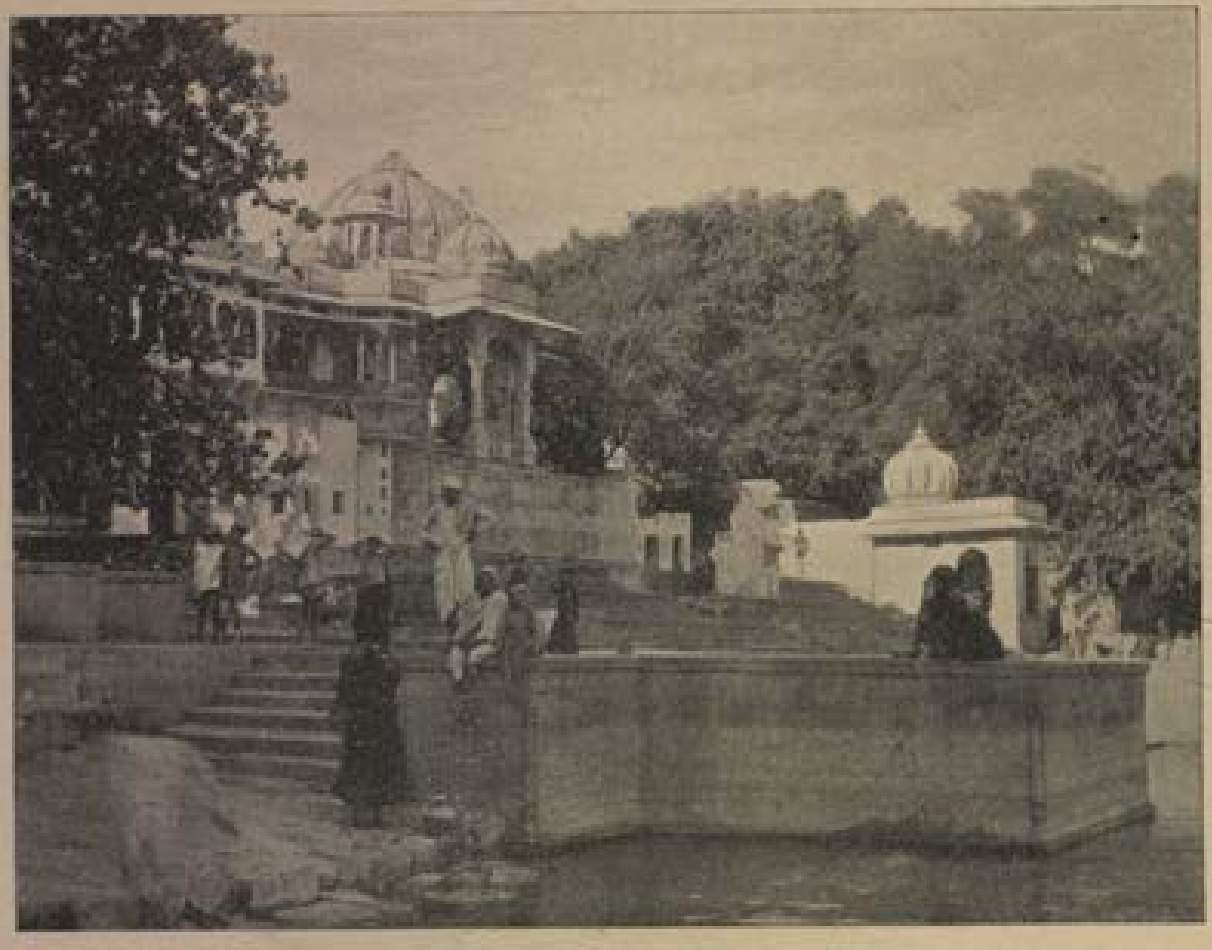
FROM THE COAST TO SRINAGAR.

Arrival at Bombay—Bombay to Rawal Pindi—Rawal Pindi to Murree—Road between Murree and Kohala—Vagaries of tonga ponies—Stages on the road—Domel to Garrhi—Garrhi to Uri—Rope bridges—Uri to Baramulla—Baramulla to Srinagar—Srinagar in March—Mohammed Khan, shikarie—Impracticability of passes—The British joint-commissioner for Ladak—Down the Jelum in a house-boat Camped in the mountains—A fellow-European—Foraging—The Sind valley—A poor lodging—After Barasingh—Back to Srinagar—Preparations for leaving.

THE unusual quiet after the ceaseless throbbing of the engines informed all whom it concerned, in the early hours of the morning of the 11th of February 1899, that the P. and O. steamship Peninsular had reached her destination, and lay motionless, poised on the still waters of the harbour of the great Eastern city. With dawn came the noise and bustle of disembarkation, with its inevitable accompaniment of hurried good-byes, yelling half-clad coolies, and custom-house delays, counteracting to a certain extent the pleasure of being once more on land, after the enforced confinement and restrictions of a sea voyage. In common with many another from the ranks of the huge army of globe-trotters that pays its hurried annual visit to India, I gave myself up, during my short stay in Bombay, to the enjoyment of novel sights and scenes: gazing fascinated at the ghastly Towers of Silence, with their

gruesome following of feathered scavengers, ever ready to perform the last offices for the corpses of pious Parsees; delighting in the gaudeous, many-coloured silks affected by the Parsee ladies; and haggling with the plausible, oily-tongued occupants of the quaint bazaars and markets, effecting bargains to my own satisfaction, and probably to the much greater satisfaction of the vendors, till the rapid flight of time warned me that to linger further on the threshold would be to curtail my visit, in any case a flying one, to the cities of the great empire beyond, and hurried me from a bewildering whirl of sight-seeing to the hot and dusty carriage of an Indian train.

Since my heavy luggage — consisting for the most part of stores, rifles, and a polygenous assortment of camp accessories, purchased and collected with a view to my projected incursion into the heart of the Himalayas — was being forwarded to Kashmir by goods train and bullock-cart, I found time to break my journey and pay short visits to many places of interest on the way: Ahmedabad, the home of the worker in gold figured silks, gold and silver tissues, brocades of all descriptions, kincobs, and all manner of tinsel ornaments; Mount Aboo with its magnificent Jain temples of carved marble; Ajmere and the lake at Pushkar, reputed the holiest in all India, a reputation which it may well merit, judging from the number and variety of temples which crowd its banks; Jeypore with its quaint pink buildings and host of workers in brass and brass-enamel ware; Agra, proud possessor of India's peerless mausoleum, and Cawnpore with its painful Mutiny associations;—so that it was not until the uncomfortable hour of two on the morning of February the 27th that I alighted from the train at Rawal Pindi, and turned my back for many a day



TEMPLE ON LAKE PUSHKAR

on the conveniences and luxuries of the civilisation of the West.

Having made the most of what was left of the small hours after reaching the hotel, I repaired to the office of Mr Danjhi Bhoy, the Parsee gentleman who runs the mail and passenger service between India and Kashmir, and asked for a *tonga*—a low two-wheeled carriage — to convey myself, my luggage, and my servant, the latter a strong, thick-set, bow-legged Hindu from Meerut, to Srinagar, Kashmir's capital, saying that I should be ready to start by midday. The sleek-looking baboo in charge, bubbling over with the innate aversion of his race to do anything in any but the most leisurely manner, assured me that to supply a tonga at such short notice was altogether out of the question; and when I pointed to the rows of empty vehicles lying idle outside, his baboo soul burst forth in a torrent of petty excuses, which was only stemmed when I casually produced from my pocket a few shining rupees. It is curious what a soothing effect the sight of a little silver (in coin form) has on the agitated nerves of an excited baboo; and on this occasion it not only had a pacifying effect, but cleared his brain to such an extent that he remembered quite suddenly that he had got a tonga and driver ready for the road, which he had until that moment forgotten, and at twelve o'clock the vehicle drove up to the door of the hotel.

Little time was lost in loading up the light luggage I was able to take with me, and as soon as all was aboard, the driver blew his horn and we were off.

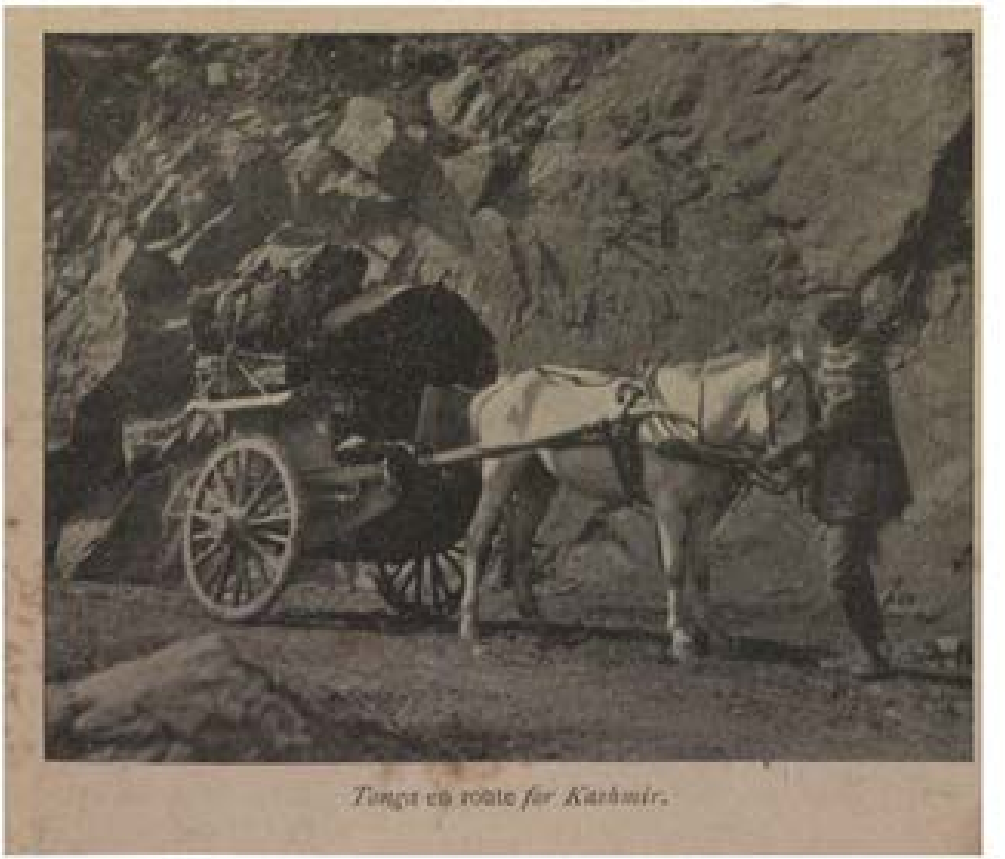
A great feeling of exhilaration swept over me as we were whirled along towards the mountains, and I tried to look into the future, and wondered where I should be and what I should be doing in another few weeks' time?

Visions of thrilling stalks after huge horned beasts, of pleasant camps amid magnificent mountain scenery, of hard marching over wild and desolate country, flitted in quick succession before me, till the sudden stopping of the tonga brought me rudely to earth again, and informed me that we had covered the six miles to the first stage, and were about to change ponies.

Fresh animals were harnessed in an incredibly short space of time, and we were speeding on again towards the great mountain-barrier which divides Kashmir from India. Seventeen miles over a dead level brought us to the foot of the mountains, after which we climbed steadily for the remainder of the day, finding fresh ponies every four miles. At Tret, a tiny plateau with a rest-house, I stopped a short time, and saw, now far below me to the south, the arid plains of the Panjab, while to north, east, and west magnificent wooded mountains filled the view. Having covered a distance of thirty-four miles, we came to snow on the road, and had to alight and walk the remaining three miles to Murree, where I intended passing the night. There were a few coolies at hand, who shouldered my luggage and carried it up to the *establishment* rejoicing in the designation of hotel. It was a poor apology for an inn, the best accommodation it could afford, at this time of year at any rate, consisting of a bare wooden room, furnished with wooden table, chair, and bedstead. As night closed in it became bitterly cold, and I was uncommonly glad of a wood fire, which after some difficulty had been induced to burn, and a large fur coat. The morning broke clear and frosty, and everything was frozen hard. Being informed that a tonga would be found below the snow a *mile* or two farther on, — for we were now descending the far side of the first mountain-chain,—

I set off on foot, with the luggage carried as before by coolies. The view was perfectly magnificent: layer upon layer of forest-clad mountains met one's gaze on every side, and in the far distance gigantic snow-clad peaks, their pure whiteness enhanced by the wonderful blue of the sky overhead, extended range upon range as far as the eye could see.

I soon found my tonga waiting for me, and as soon



Tonga en route for Kashmir.

as the luggage was stowed away we started off again. The road being now downhill we only had one pony, a fact which in no way lessened the excitement of the drive. The road was steep as only mountain roads can be, and the corners sharp and frequent. On one side rose precipitous mountains, and on the other were sheer precipices, in places of many hundred feet, with nothing

to prevent one driving over if one felt so inclined; and stories are not wanting of tongas dashed over the edge and of lives lost on the steep descent from Murree to the Jelum.

We had covered about twenty-nine miles when we reached Kohala, a dāk-bungalow, on the banks of the Jelum, where lunch was to be had, and where we crossed the river into the territories of his Highness the Maharajah of Kashmir. From here on the road rose with a slight but steady incline, and we again had two ponies in the tonga. I found that plenty of excitement was to be had at the different changes. The great difficulty seemed to be to get the newly harnessed pair to start. They were invariably willing to go any conceivable way except forwards, and the off pony not being harnessed to a pole, but merely being kept alongside of his companion by a trace on his off side, as often as not managed to duck under and get on the wrong side of his trace, upon which ensued a muddle of endless variety. When at last they did take it into their heads to go, they dashed off at a gallop, and the next stage was reached without further difficulty. A stage consists of a mud shelter, and on getting fresh ponies the syce in charge accompanies one on the step of the carriage, and on arrival at the next stage leads his ponies quietly back again. The weather was all that could be desired, and the scenery consequently looking its best, the dark green of the thickly wooded mountains and valleys in the foreground standing out vividly against the great jagged outline of pure white peaks in the distance. At the picturesque little rest-house of Domel I got a cup of tea, and then drove on another fourteen miles to Garrhi, where I put up for the night, having covered about seventy miles during the day.

I was up early on the morning of the 29th and found it pretty chilly. By 8 A.M. we were once more on our way, as I intended reaching Srinagar by night-fall. The day passed much as the previous one, there being little variety in long-distance tonga-driving, except what is afforded by the scenery, which became of a more rugged nature as we neared the little hamlet of Uri. I got lunch at the rest-house, and strolled down to the river afterwards to inspect the rope-bridge by which the natives cross it. On reaching the spot I found there were two side by side, one consisting merely of a single rope, strung from bank to bank, with a loop of the same material suspended from it; the other of three ropes, two of them parallel about 3 feet above the third. The lower of the three ropes in number two was for walking purposes, while the upper two served as rails for the hands. There were several people crossing by the single rope, either sitting in the loop and hauling themselves across by pulling hand over hand on the main rope, or being hauled across by men on the far side pulling a cord attached to the loop in which they were sitting. From Uri I went on, reaching Baramulla by four o'clock. Here it was very cold, and for some way there were heavy drifts of snow by the roadside, in places as much as 8 or 9 feet deep. Here, too, begins an avenue of poplars which, with the exception of a few trifling breaks, extends the whole way to Srinagar, a distance of thirty miles.

I was becoming decidedly tired and bored with long-continued driving, and was devoutly thankful when we at length rumbled into Srinagar, our approach being heralded by the inevitable blast of our coachman's horn. It was late—about 9 P.M.—and of course quite dark, so that my first impressions of Kashmir's capital

were perforce delayed till the morrow; and having informed the tonga agents of my arrival, I drove straight to the house of Mr W. Mitchell, who at the request of a mutual friend had kindly promised to do anything he could to assist me in starting my expedition, and had most thoughtfully got ready a house-boat for me, which he put at my disposal while I remained in the valley of Kashmir. The favoured individuals who are privileged to occupy houses in the lands of the Maharajah of Kashmir are few, and as there is as yet no hotel[1] in the land, one is reduced to living either in a house-boat or a tent.

On the following morning I had my first view of the capital. Srinagar—the city of the sun or the city of prosperity—was on this occasion anything but a city of the sun, nor, for the matter of that, did it strike me in the light of a city of over-abundant prosperity. The snow in the valley had but recently melted; at the foot of the mountains it was in a state of melting; and everywhere everything was in a state of slush. The sky was grey and overcast; while the steady drizzle in the valley and the dense clouds on the mountains were sure proof that snow was still falling at no very great distance above us. The main thoroughfare is the river Jelum, which runs through the middle of the city, and is in summer crowded with house-boats and *doongas*, the corresponding native boat. Beyond the Residency, the Maharajah's palace, and the few European houses, the city consists of tortuous, straggling streets, or rather alleys, narrow and dirty in the extreme, formed by the squalid hovels of the native population; and the odour which ascends to one's nostrils is in keeping with the surroundings of dirt and squalor. In the better-class houses on the banks of the Jelum,

[1] A hotel has since been built, and was opened in the spring of 1900.

which one walks into from a boat much as one does in Venice, are to be found merchants in carved wood, *shawls*, so called papier-maché, silver, and a medley of odds and ends in the way of curios.

During the morning I interviewed one Mohammed Khan,[1] a Kashmiri who was to accompany me as shikarie. The snowfall in Kashmir had been heavy, and this, in addition to the snow which was still falling in the mountains, was sufficient to prevent me going straight into Baltistan as I had hoped, owing to the impracticable nature of the Zogi La, the pass by which I *should* cross the chief range between Kashmir and that country, which, though not a very high one, being only 11,500 feet, is much dreaded by the Kashmiris owing to the frequent avalanches which in bad weather crash down the narrow precipitous gorge which leads to its summit.

Mohammed Khan, therefore, proposed that we should journey a short way up the valley of Kashmir, and try for a barasingh stag in the neighbouring nullahs, while waiting for the weather to improve. This seemed under the circumstances to be the best plan, so I settled to start the next day. My heavy luggage had not yet turned up, so there was plenty to be done during the remainder of the day hiring tents and other necessaries, and purchasing the few stores I should require for a week or ten days. I also ordered *puttoo* (thick native cloth) shooting clothes, *chaplies* (a kind of leather sandal), thick socks of *puttoo* for using with grass-shoes, &c., all of which were to be ready on my return to Srinagar in a week's time.

In the evening I dined with Major Chenevix Trench, British joint commissioner for Ladak, at this time acting as assistant Resident, who supplied me with

[1] The name given to my shikarie is a fictitious one.

parwanas or passports to local officials to facilitate my obtaining transport and supplies, and gave me much useful information about Ladak, where he had officiated off and on as British joint commissioner for something like seven years, travelling up to Leh early in June and returning to Kashmir the beginning of October.

On the morning of the 4th I found myself being punted slowly down the Jelum by half-a-dozen lazy Kashmiri *mangis* (boatmen), with a smaller boat in tow which fulfilled the office of kitchen. After leaving the slums of Srinagar behind, we emerged into the open valley, which runs in a north-westerly direction between fine ranges of forest-clad mountains for a total length of a hundred miles with an average breadth of thirty. By dark we had not reached the spot at which I was to land, though with any but Kashmiri boatmen we should doubtless have been there long before, so lay to for the night. All was still and peaceful, and the gentle lapping of the water against the sides of the boat made a pleasant lullaby, which I appreciated all the more from having spent the greater part of the last fortnight in trains and cheerless bungalows. When I awoke the sun was high in the heavens, and we were moving slowly on. By midday we arrived opposite the hills in which I intended shooting, and a walk of a couple of miles from the river brought us to the foot of the mountains. Fine ground it looked, traversed in every direction by magnificent corries, and covered with snow nearly to the bottom. Having pitched the tents in a suitable spot, I went a short way up the mountains immediately above me, to have a look round before dark, and saw several hinds and small stags before returning to camp at dusk. Shortly after I had got back, I was a good deal surprised to see a

European walking towards my tents. This turned out to be Captain Bellew of the 16th Lancers, who was on a year's furlough, and was also after barasingh close by. It seemed he had had no luck up till then, having seen very few shootable heads. As he had arrived on the ground before me, I arranged to move farther afield in the morning, and by 8 A.M. was on my way, going over the hills myself, while my camp moved along the foot of the range, towards the Sind valley. The day was brilliant and the views on all sides magnificent; but it was terribly hard work wading through soft snow, which in many places, where exposed to the sun, let one in up to the knee and even deeper. The only game I saw during the day was some hinds and small stags, and I got back to camp in the evening pretty well exhausted. The following day I sent men out in different directions to look for stags, while I took a shot-gun myself in search of something for the pot. I shot several brace of chickor, a species of mountain partridge, and was climbing about among some rocky ground thickly covered with thorn-bush, when up jumped a young leopard about 40 yards in front of me. The temptation to fire, though my weapon was only a shot-gun, was too strong to be resisted; but I need hardly say there was no leopard bagged. The men got back to camp by dark, having seen nothing, so I settled to march up the Sind valley to a nullah running out of it called the Wangat, which had the reputation of being good barasingh ground. A couple of ponies were secured from a neighbouring village to carry the tents, and coolies for the rest of the baggage. I also obtained some eggs and fowls from the same village, paying 2d. a-dozen for the eggs and 3d. apiece for the fowls, which seemed to me to be

cheap; but I subsequently discovered that à sufficient price for eggs was 1½d. the dozen!

We had a long march before us, so started in good time, and I sent a message to my boatman telling him to take the boat back to Srinagar, as I should return from the Wangat by land.

It was a pleasant day for walking, and I stepped along at a good pace, accompanied by a Kashmiri as guide and tiffin-coolie (luncheon-carrier). As we went up the Sind valley the scenery became grander, and the snow lay lower, till by the time we reached the mouth of the Wangat nullah we were tramping through soft snow on our path. I was beginning to get pretty sick of walking—for twenty miles is a long march at the beginning of a trip before one has had time to get into condition—when we came to a small collection of huts dignified by the name of village. Here I was to camp; but the question now arose as to where the tents were to be pitched. It was clearly out of the question to pitch them in the deep soft snow which covered the ground; and after some discussion the headman of the village offered to put an old barn at my disposal.

I climbed into the upper storey of the barn—the lower was a cow-shed—by a pile of dirty snow, and examined my surroundings. It was not the most desirable of residences, being more than half full of straw, and having on three sides large apertures, which might have been window-places, had there been any signs of windows, which there were not. The roof, too, was only partial, the better part of it having, I suppose, been carried away during the winter. However, one cannot be particular on such occasions, and when I had hauled up my camp-table, chair, and basin, and stuffed up the worst of the apertures with straw, I reflected

that I might be a good deal worse off than I was. After dinner, which, cooked by a Kashmiri cook, the dirtiest species of the genus yet discovered, close outside the cow-shed, which, what with snow, slush, and general filth, could have given points and a beating to any pig-sty, was better than might have been expected, I wrapped myself up in my blankets, and throwing myself down on a pile of straw, was soon in that deep and dreamless slumber which is the reward of hard work and an open-air life.

The next day was among the most tiring I have ever spent. At 8 A.M. I started climbing after barasingh. The mountain-sides were extremely steep, and covered with a layer of snow varying in depth from 2 to 4 feet, in which we sank up to our knees at every step, and often up to our waists. It had, too, an unpleasant habit of giving way with one, on the steepest and consequently most arduous places, and one then glissaded gracefully down the distance one had, after much toil and labour during the previous half hour or so, succeeded in ascending.

During the day we came across the track of a large stag, but in spite of all our efforts, failed to meet with the animal himself. By 3 P.M. I once more reached the foot of the mountains, and made for the dilapidated but welcome barn. It rained a good deal during the afternoon and evening, and my habitation was in consequence not as dry as it might have been.

I thought I would spend one more day in search of barasingh before returning to Srinagar, and early the next morning started off again. On this occasion I was luckier, for I managed to bring off a running shot at the only stag I saw. Unluckily, when I came to examine the fallen animal, I found his right antler was broken off short, probably in an encounter with some

other monarch of the forest, and his head was in consequence spoilt.

The following day I started for Srinagar. The ride there was not of the most pleasing description, for the pony I had secured was possessed of nothing but a native wooden saddle, and my guide being on foot, I had the pleasure of being joggled about on this instrument of torture from 8 A.M. till 5 P.M., when I at last reached the Residency, where I was to be the guest of Major Trench.

The next two days, as may well be imagined, were pretty busy ones, occupied in packing and rushing about obtaining the remaining stores, &c., which were wanting. My heavy luggage from India had arrived, and everything that I was going to take with me had to be made up into packets not exceeding 50 lb. each; for coolies would be my only means of transport for a long time, and the weight which a man will carry for a day's march is 50 lb. To carry the stores in I obtained oblong wicker baskets with an outer covering of leather, known in Kashmir as *kiltas*. Before leaving I also obtained six *yāk-dans* (leather boxes of a convenient size to be slung one on each side of a pony or yāk), and having packed them with stores, left them in charge of my Kashmiri boatman, who was to keep them till he heard from me, when he was to send them by pony to Leh, for by the time I should require them the track would be open for animal transport.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE MARCH.

Leaving Srinagar My servants Difficulty in securing a cook—Manasbal to Kangan—Kangan to Goond Marching in snow—Native hut—Early start—Sonamerg—Baltal—Wind on the Zogi La—Machahoi—Mataian Dry cold Dras—Serai at Tashgam—Narrow escape of coolies—Dry land once more—Agriculturists—Hardas to Olthing—Roads in Baltistan—Rope-bridge of Karmung—*Kahauis*—A long march Crossing the Indus Shigar—A game of polo—Ibex—Garm Pani.

THE eventful morning at last arrived, and at 11 A.M. on the 14th, with everything in an apparently hopeless muddle, I started down the Jelum in my house-boat. While punting slowly through the city, I was assailed by numerous native tradesmen in small *shikarra* boats, requiring their accounts to be settled, and after much haggling and squirming on the part of the cringing, fawning Kashmiris, this genial task was effected. At last we got clear of the city, and I felt that I was really on my way. By evening we came to a bridge close to the village of Manasbal, where I was to land the next day; but the bridge, it appeared, was too narrow to admit of my house-boat passing through, so I had to lay to for the night, and cover the short remaining distance on the smaller boat used for cooking, in the morning.

I may here make mention of the different members

of my party. First was my Hindoo servant Ram Pershad, whom I have already mentioned, and who alone among my followers could speak or understand English. He proved to be an admirable servant, and in addition to his duties as my body-servant, I made him responsible for the stores and other baggage. Mohammed, Kashmiri, my shikarie, was head of the rest of the party. His duties were to procure transport and supplies wherever available, and to act as stalker when required to do so after game. The individual next in importance was the cook. I had had considerable difficulty in securing this very important functionary, and had only engaged my present man, Khada Bux, at the last moment. The cook who had been

Ram Pershad.

with me while after barasingh was unwilling to go so far from home, and I had therefore instructed Mohammed to engage one, and to arrange for him to meet me in Srinagar, which he had done. He had, however, to march from his village to Srinagar, a task which appeared to be too much for him; for on his arrival, two days before my departure, he complained of pains in his back and physical prostration generally. He was a delicate-looking man, and I saw clearly that he would not do at all, and accordingly summoned him to an interview. My Hindustani was at the time limited in the extreme, and the interview was short and to the point, he, the cook, leaving my service the same day.

I was standing on the bank of the river, the day before my departure, somewhat exercised in my mind as to whether, and if so how, I was to secure the services of a reliable cook, when the question was somewhat unexpectedly solved. I became aware of a tall lank individual trying to attract my attention by salaaming profoundly. At this moment I was joined by Mitchell, who on hearing of my difficulty remarked that the individual kowtowing in the background was the very man I wanted. This was good news indeed, and we at once summoned the man, to inquire if he would accompany me on the morrow. It appeared that he had heard of my being in want of a cook, and had come to apply for the situation. If he was not the finest of cooks, he was at anyrate a tough old warrior, and not likely to knock up, having among other adventures been through the siege of Chitral.

The rest of my party was made up by four Kashmiris—Saltana, Subhana, Jovara, and Abaloo. The first of these was what is known in Kashmir as a tiffin-coolie. His duties consisted in accompanying me

wherever I went, and carrying tiffin (lunch) and anything else I might require. Subhana and Jovara's chief duties were as post-runners, and making themselves generally useful in camp when not so engaged. Abaloo assisted the cook. Such, then, was my party when I started from Srinagar—coolies for the baggage being obtained at the different villages I came across from time to time.

On the morning of the 15th I left the house-boat, and getting on to the cook-boat, which was small enough to go through the bridge, soon reached Manasbal. Here coolies were engaged, and after considerable delay were loaded and started on their way—some twenty in all—on the day's march.

The first day's march is always a lengthy proceeding, as the loads are not suited to the coolies, &c., and much shifting of goods and repacking of bundles ensues, till at length all the loads have been reduced to suitable shape and size, and can then be kept so for future days' marching, as only stores in immediate use, cooking utensils, and bedding need be undone at the end of the day's march.

My route for the first day lay up the Sind valley, the same track that I had traversed on my way to the Wangat, and at the end of a walk of about fifteen miles I came to the village of Kangan, where I stayed the night. Here I found a serai, or building for the use of travellers, and though no furniture is provided, it makes a comfortable shelter for the night.

The morning of the 16th was tolerably fine, and about 8 A.M. I started on my third day's journey. The track still lay up the Sind valley, and was in a most disgusting condition from recently melted snow, causing one to slip back at every step. In the afternoon I reached the village of Goond, where I found

Bellew. As he was also going into Baltistan we had agreed to march together, at anyrate as far as our route was the same. Here we had to engage coolies to accompany us for the next five or six days, as we should be unable to get others this side of the Zogi La, owing to the smallness of the few villages that exist between Goond and Dras; and we also had to take all the food we should require for that time, and a bit over in case of accidents, as no supplies would be obtainable. Considerable difficulty was experienced in collecting a sufficient number of men by the next morning, for we found we should require fifty between us, the large number necessary being due partly to the heaviness of the road at this season, and partly to the men having also to carry food for themselves. Here at Goond I found no serai; but noticed that Bellew had ousted the family from the best room of one of the houses, so followed suit and did ditto for another—for the ground was in such a filthy state that a tent would have been little better than a pig-sty.

Shortly after leaving on the following morning we got into snow, and left behind us the last of *terra firma* that we were to see for some time.

The going was frightful, as the snow was very deep and soft, and we soon left the coolies floundering about under their loads in a sorry plight; indeed so bad was it that it took them from early morning till late in the afternoon to accomplish a distance of only six or seven miles. By midday I had reached a village consisting of four or five huts, called Rezam, and as there was no more chance of shelter for a considerable distance, thought I would wait, at anyrate till I saw how the coolies progressed; and, as I have already mentioned, their progress was, to say the least of it, moderate, and

resulted in our spending the night where we were. I secured the best room in one of the huts, while Bellew did the same in another. The best room I could find consisted of four mud walls, a mud floor, and a wooden roof, twelve feet in length by six feet in breadth and height. The natives do not use fireplaces, but just light a wood-fire anywhere on the floor. There was no chimney, one window barely a foot square, and a door that one had to squeeze through half doubled up. The consequence was that I could not see across the room for smoke. This was unbearable, the smoke from the wood-fires making one's eyes very sore, and rather than have the smoke I did without the fire. Nor do the people seem to be possessed of any furniture beyond their cooking pots; but this I found an advantage rather than the reverse, as, owing to the smallness of the room, I was only just able to squeeze myself in when my own table, chair, and bedstead were installed. As soon as dinner could be got ready Bellew and I dined together wrapped up in *poshteen* (sheepskin) coats, and despite our somewhat unpleasing situation, owing to the cold, the smoke, and the dirt, managed to enjoy the meal as much as, or perhaps more than, if we had been partaking of it between the walls of a more luxurious dining-room under the conditions of civilised life.

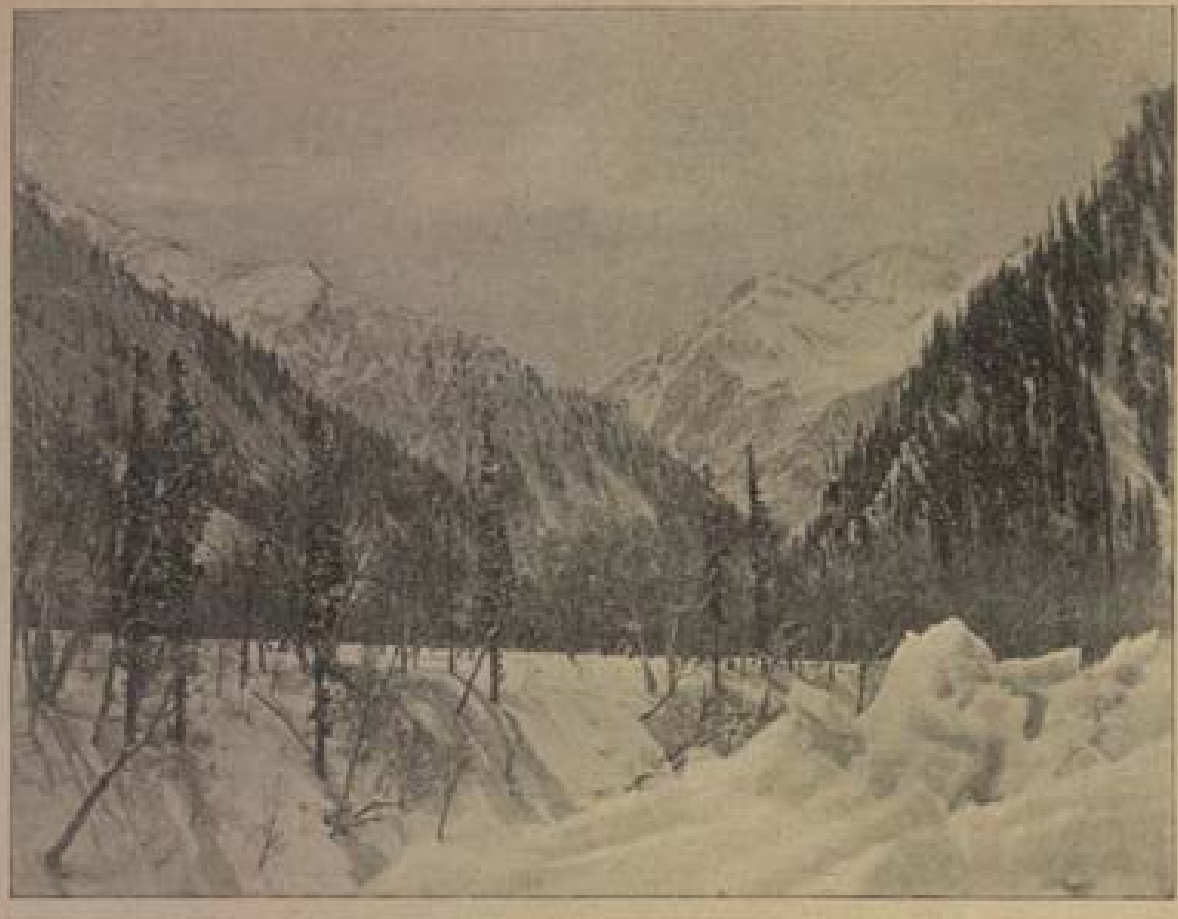
The next day I rose at 5.30 A.M., as I hoped to get over the greater part of the day's march before the sun softened the snow. After a light breakfast I started off, and found the snow firm, as there had luckily been a sharp frost during the night. We were rapidly approaching what appeared to be the end of the Sind valley, and a mile or two from Rezam found a narrow defile branching off eastward. This was the Sonamerg gorge, and up it our road lay. The scenery was quite

magnificent. The track led through a narrow ravine, with huge precipitous mountains rising sheer on each side; here and there jagged rocks stood out from the general ground of dazzling snow, and all along on either side fine fir-trees grew, their beautiful green being intensified by the glistening whiteness of the whole surrounding, while the glare from a brilliant sky above made the wearing of blue goggles a necessity. By eleven o'clock I came upon a few huts buried in the snow—Sonamerg, where I walked straight off the ground into the upper storey of one of them, and installed myself for the night. The distance cannot have been more than ten miles; but the motive power required to propel one over those ten miles of snow would have been sufficient to have carried one twenty miles on any ordinary road. The room in which I found myself differed little from the one I had occupied at Rezam, with the exception of being a trifle lower, with the result that I found myself unable to stand up inside. Sonamerg stands about 8500 feet above sea-level, and the scene all round was one of magnificent grandeur. Having drunk in to the full the beauty of the scenery, I squatted down to the more prosaic but none the less necessary proceeding of cooking myself a meal, no one but Saltana, carrying food and a small folding canteen, having arrived, after which I whiled away the time as best I could till the coolies turned up with the baggage.

We were still blessed with the finest weather, and there was a sharp, crisp feeling in the air as I left Sonamerg at 6.30 on Sunday morning; and no wonder, for on consulting the thermometer, I found it was freezing 15°. The snow was hard, admitting of one walking anywhere without going through, which made going good, and I went along at a good pace, reaching

Baltal, distant about nine miles, at 9.15. The scenery the whole way was superb, and as I started just before sunrise, the coming dawn cast a pale green tinge over everything, which was exceedingly beautiful, the smallest detail standing out in the thin clear air with extraordinary sharpness of outline. There is no village at Baltal, which is situated at the foot of the Zogi La, but a hut for travellers and post-runners, with a stove—a great luxury. Here I soon had a meal cooking, for I had had very little before starting, and then inspected the foot of the pass. There was a fearful gale blowing, and it is this wind that is one of the chief difficulties to be encountered in crossing the pass. However, an old post-runner at the hut volunteered the information that it frequently dropped towards midnight, or in the early hours of the morning, with which consolation we retired after an early dinner at 5.30, with instructions that we were to be called at midnight *if* the wind had fallen, and if not, at 4 A.M.

At 4 A.M. I was waked, and found the wind blowing a perfect hurricane, with no apparent prospect of its ever dropping. The thermometer was not very low—25° Fahr.—but the wind was icy. I wrapped my head well up in a turban, and having put on two Cardigan jackets among other things, started off accompanied by two coolies. The gorge leading up to the pass is steep and narrow, and was now full of snow many feet deep, which presented an almost perpendicular wall up which we had to cut our way. The wind shrieked down this funnel with fearful violence, and it seemed as if the whole of Pandemonium had been let loose, and had been sent tearing down the pass in a wild unearthly race to reach the bottom. At every few steps we were obliged to stop and turn our backs to prevent ourselves being suffocated by the pressure of the blast. After



VIEW FROM BALTAL.

going about seven or eight miles, which had taken us over the summit of the pass, 11,500 feet, we reached the post-runners' shelter of Machahoi, it having taken us five hours to cover the distance. It was a wonderful relief to crawl into the warm hut, entirely buried in snow, where we were able to investigate the effects of the icy wind. Every patch of clothes, and the hair on one's face where moisture had collected, were icicles, which in the case of one's face was very unpleasant; and I actually found the white of an egg, which I had just broken preparatory to *cooking*, was frozen solid, after which I was not surprised to find the cold tea I carried in a felt-covered water-bottle was tea ice! However, with a huge wood-fire in the small wood hut, entirely buried as it was under snow, with no openings beyond the one by which I had crawled in, I soon began to thaw, and by the time Bellew arrived was as comfortable as could be, and had the proud distinction of being the first European across the pass that year.

By 12.30 we were both somewhat rested, and started on the five or six miles that remained between us and Mataian. The descent was hardly perceptible, and, as Mr E. F. Knight so aptly puts it, "The Zogi La is like no ordinary pass, and may rather be described as a gigantic step, upwards of 2000 feet in height, by which one rises from Kashmir on to the elevated tableland of Tibet."[1]

The wind, however, had made the top layer of snow exceedingly crumbly, and we sank in just as if it was in a rapid thaw, a state in which it was very far from being, on this high frost-bound plateau. By 3.30 I reached Mataian, which appeared to me to consist of a single hut, until, struck by the peculiar hollow sound

[1] Where Three Empires Meet. E. F. Knight.

caused by my walking in the vicinity of the visible hut, I stopped to inquire the reason. There was a faint smile on the grim face of the man as he replied that we were walking on the village! The single hut I had observed was built on the roof of the other houses, which were square flat-roofed huts at this time below the level of the snow. On going a little further, I noticed steam issuing from holes in what I had thought was the ground, and realised that it was coming up

The summit of the Zoji La, 11,500 feet.

from the inhabitants below, a mixed company of villagers, children, and their flocks of sheep and goats, who, from what I gathered, live with them during the winter. I was given the hut on the roof, which was the smallest thing in the way of a dwelling-place that I have ever been in, and had no opening beyond the door, through which I had literally to crawl on my hands and knees. The advantage of these very small windowless hovels is that after one has been occupying them for a short time, no matter how cold the

weather outside, they become exceedingly warm and comfortable.

The coolies, who had been struggling through the interminable snow since 5 A.M., reached Mataian pretty well exhausted at 8 P.M.; and no wonder, poor beggars, for a load of 50 lb. on a day's march such as this must be a very severe burden. Altogether we congratulated ourselves on having crossed the pass most successfully, and we had reason, for I afterwards heard from a friend who crossed the pass a month later, that he had spent seventeen hours on the march, and had had the misfortune to lose one of his men, who died from the severe exposure.

I was up soon after 4 A.M., and stepped out into a clear atmosphere of wonderful stillness, through which the myriad stars shone and sparkled with a brilliance unknown in lower and damper climes. The air was so dry and still that the cold was scarcely appreciable, though on consulting the thermometer I found that it was freezing 25 at that moment. I did not get off till 5.30; but as Dras, the village I intended marching to during the day, was not more that fourteen miles off, there was no particular hurry. The track, which merely consisted of the footprints of the post-runners, led through vast fields of undulating snow, the monotony of which was only broken by the sombre outline of the more precipitous rocks on either side, and altogether presented a scene of intense dreariness and desolation. Not a living creature of any sort was to be seen or heard, and one might have been passing through a land of shadows but for the arduous reality of having to pound through the crumbly snow. Daylight broke, and with it things assumed a more natural aspect, and the sun too became quite warm before I found myself at the snow-bound village of Dras, known

to the Tibetans as "Hembaps" or "snow-land," a name which would seem to be strikingly appropriate.

Here I found a substantial rest-house, built the year previous, for the use of travellers, merchants, and any one else who from business or pleasure might find themselves constrained to travel on the main route from India to Central Asia. Bellew and I both took advantage of this to indulge in a bath, in my case the first since leaving the boat on the 15th,—baths in these cold regions without adequate shelter being impossible. Pleasant though it was to be in a clean abode with doors and windows, more or less like an ordinary civilised habitation, I am bound to admit that during the night it was very much colder than the small windowless hovels of the natives.

I got up at 4 A.M., but finding that Mohammed had not yet succeeded in collecting sufficient coolies, for we got fresh men here, I returned not altogether unwillingly to sleep, telling Ram Pershad to wake me as soon as the coolies turned up. It was about 6.30 when, the required number of men having been collected, I once more started on my way, the thermometer at the time registering 23° of frost. The going to start with was good, the snow being hard and firm, and for the first two hours I went along at a good pace. After this, however, the road became bad, running along steep mountain-sides where the snow was soft, and it was getting on towards midday when I reached the hamlet of Tashgam, distant from Dras about fifteen miles. Here I found a serai, which I got into by climbing down from the roof, the snow outside being on a level with it; and having had one of the rooms cleared out—a necessary proceeding in the serais in this part of the world—and firewood collected, I cooked breakfast. The serai of Baltistan

is a square flat-roofed building, enclosing a courtyard, with rooms—if they can be designated as such—opening into it from the four sides. It is of course an abode of the most primitive description, without furniture of any kind, and the rooms having no floor beyond the bare ground on which they are built; but it affords a welcome shelter when pitching tents is out of the question. The coolies with the baggage did not arrive till 5 P.M., and it turned out that they were very lucky to have arrived at all, for they had barely passed a particularly steep cliff when a deep rumbling as of thunder was heard, growing rapidly louder and nearer. The cause was soon apparent; for down from a precipitous height above came tearing an enormous mass of snow, increasing in volume at every second in its downward course, and in an incredibly short space of time the track just passed over by the coolies was buried in hundreds of tons of snow and *débris*.

On Thursday the 23rd I was off at 5.15 A.M. The going was bad, up and down steep hillsides, and the snow in places very treacherous, so much so that on one occasion I got *into* soft *snow* above my waist, and it took the two men I had with me all their time to haul me out again. At 12.30, after having been floundering through the snow for over seven hours, with never a halt of more than five minutes at a time, I reached the village of Hardas, situated in a small nullah in the steep mountain-side, overhanging the Dras river. Some two miles before reaching Hardas I left the main trade-route into Central Asia, and crossing the Dras river, branched off to the north. After crossing the river I got out of snow for the first time since leaving Goond on the 17th. The relief was something enormous, and after having waded

and floundered through snow for a distance of over eighty miles, to be walking on solid, hard ground again was quite delightful. I found no serai here, but put up, as usual on such occasions, in a native hut. The people were beginning to wake up after their winter hibernation, and were busily engaged attending to the terraced fields, which were to produce their only means of support throughout the following winter. A curious scene was being enacted just outside my hut. An old man was ploughing his little plot of ground, the plough, a roughly shaped log of wood, being drawn by a woman—presumably his wife—and a bullock harnessed side by side to the rude pole! Such is the life of a Balti, for we were now in the outskirts of Baltistan, whose poverty is extreme, and whose existence is simply from hand to mouth, and who verily appears to be little removed from the very beasts of the field. Their religion, too, which is Mohammedan, allowing as it does plurality of wives and the large families consequent thereon, increases their poverty, and often brings them wellnigh to the brink of starvation.

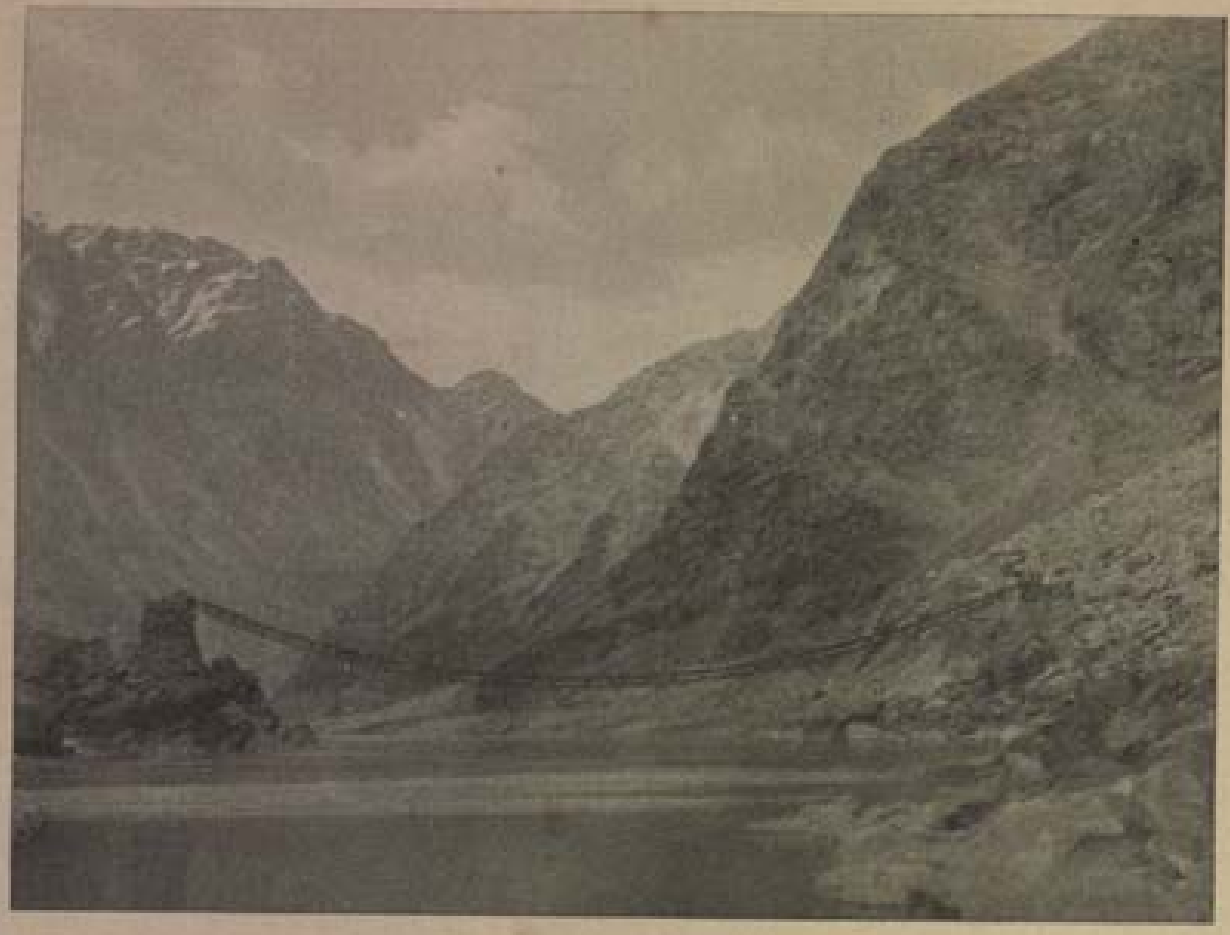
The next morning I made quite a late start, leaving Hardas at 8 A.M. The track wound up and down along steep mountain-sides like a switchback railway; but the delight of walking along on solid ground was great. Every now and then we picked our way among huge boulders, hurled down, doubtless, in bygone ages from the beetling heights above. Now we were walking along by the river, which ran along the foot of the valley; now we were scrambling hundreds of feet above it, looking down on it far below, from great crags of rock. On the mountain-sides, rough and scarred by the progress of time, was no sign of vegetation, except here and there low down by the river-

bed, where, cultivated and irrigated by the inhabitants of this wild country, small oases of green peeped out from amid the surrounding desolation. At one place I noticed natives washing for gold by the river; but the amount thus obtained is very small. By 2 P.M. I reached the village of Olthing, where I spent the night. The morning of the 25th broke stormy, and I delayed my departure till 7 A.M. By 10 A.M. I reached Tarcutte, where I found a serai, so cooked breakfast while I awaited the arrival of the coolies, who turned up towards midday. Having paid them off,—four annas, equivalent to 4d., per man, the recognised pay for a march of from twelve to fifteen miles,—I engaged fresh men and started off again along the precipitous mountain-track. Before long I reached the Indus, and here the track became worse than ever, consisting in places merely of stakes driven into the face of the perpendicular granite cliff, with slabs of stone and bits of trees laid across from stake to stake. This looks slender, but seems to bear all right. At other times there was no track at all, and one had to scramble along, climbing among great boulders. By 3 P.M., having covered about eight miles since leaving Tarcutte, I came to a small village, and as the coolies with the baggage were a long way behind, took up my quarters in one of the village houses for the night. The hovel was filthily dirty, and I had great difficulty in ejecting a family of goats, who were very loath to leave their comfortable quarters among the pots and pans, and general filth of the dingy apartment, and were most persevering in returning whenever opportunity occurred.

I left at eight the next morning, and after walking about four miles came to the village of Karmung, where fresh coolies had to be collected. There is a

fine specimen of a rope-bridge common in these parts, which I took the opportunity of photographing. After the delay usually experienced in collecting and loading fresh coolies, I resumed my march *en route* for Tolti, the village I hoped to reach by evening. The sky was overcast with heavy clouds; but the heat and stillness in the valley were oppressive, probably owing to its being shut in by such high and perpendicular mountains on either side, and walking and climbing over the rough and broken ground was very fatiguing. At Tolti, which I reached between three and four o'clock, I found the usual serai, though a trifle more holey than usual, and as rain came on towards evening, I amused myself by stuffing up the larger holes in the flat roof with straw and mud. Here I obtained for the first time some *kabanis* (the dried apricot of Baltistan), which made an excellent stew, and a pleasant variation to the somewhat monotonous succession of dishes evolved by the brain of Khada Bux, which seldom appeared to run off a single line of thought, at anyrate where cooking was concerned.

One soon gets into a pretty hard state of condition with perpetual marching over rough mountain-tracks, and I set out from Tolti at 7 A.M. with the intention of getting through a long day's march. I covered the distance between Tolti and Parcutta, said to be fifteen miles, without a halt of any sort, and finding Bellew, who had made an early start, here, sat down with him under the shade of a friendly tree, where by the side of a sparkling mountain stream we regaled ourselves with cold tiffin while we awaited the arrival of the servants and coolies. The track just here was rather better, and good enough for ponies, and hearing that I should be able to get one at the next village, I started off again at one o'clock, having paid off the



ROPE-BRIDGE AT KARMUNG.

coolies from Tolti and loaded up fresh men from Parcutta. After walking steadily for an hour, I came in sight of the next village, rather glad at the idea of getting a pony, for it was very hot in the middle of the day. To my disgust there was not an animal to be had, and there was nothing for it but to continue on foot, which I did, reaching the serai at Gol shortly before 6 P.M. with the feeling that I had done a fair day's work, having walked close on thirty miles during the day, a good deal of which was very irksome, being through the soft dry sand on the banks of the Indus.

In the evening Bellew and I had our last dinner together, for from here our paths lay in different directions, he going on to Skardu, on his way to Haramosh, while I crossed the Indus for Shigar, on my way to the Basha nullah. I slept soundly and well after my long march, and did not leave Gol till 8 A.M. I trudged along steadily for a little over two hours, when I reached the point where I was to cross the Indus. The method of crossing was peculiar. About twenty sheep- and goat-skins having been inflated, were tied together, and then lashed to a light frame of sticks. Seated on this rickety conveyance, I was punted across the river, and then watched my baggage and servants follow. After the third crossing the skins became decidedly flat, whereupon a couple of Baltis applied their mouths to them and blew them out again. I then went on till midday before resting for lunch. At one o'clock I started again, and now left the Indus for good, branching off across the mountains northwards. A tramp of about eighteen miles in all brought me to the flourishing village of Shigar, situated on the river of the same name. The village, for Baltistan, is large, the largest,

in fact, that I had seen, and I had not been in the place long before the rajah arrived to pay his compliments, and after having made me an offering of a dish of dried apricots, informed me that he was about to play a game of polo. This I watched with much interest. The ground was long and very narrow, and at one end were seated a group of musicians armed with tom-toms and other heathen instruments, who made day hideous with fearful and awful noises whenever a goal was hit. It is immaterial apparently how many players there are on either side, the game waxing fast and furious, with no intervals such as we are accustomed to in polo as we play it, till a certain number of goals have been scored by one side or the other.

From here my way lay up the Shigar river, which flows through a large valley, wider and more open than the valley of the Indus which I had just left, with a fairly flat sandy and stony bottom, from which rise on either side great jagged mountains with brilliant snow-clad peaks. Here and there in the valley appeared tiny oases in the form of small villages, surrounded by willows, poplars, and apricot-trees. A few clouds rested on the highest peaks, but overhead the sun shone powerfully from a cloudless sky. After walking for a couple of hours, I sat down and examined the ground with the telescope, for I was now in the land of the ibex, but made out no beasts, so went on again till one o'clock, when I sat down on the banks of the Shigar for lunch. At 2 P.M. I started again and walked on till four, when I came to a small village and pitched the tents for the night. At eight the next morning I continued my march up the Shigar, halting at midday to examine the ground near by, this time with more success. I was moving the glass slowly over the ground when something caught my eye, and fixing the

telescope on it, I realised that I was at last gazing on the first living ibex I had ever seen. There was a male among the seven or eight I made out, and to my inexperienced eye he appeared to be a magnificent creature; but Mohammed pronounced him too small to stop for.

Soon after this I reached the point where the Basha and Braldo rivers unite to form the Shigar. Leaving

Garm Pani.

the Braldo on my right, I marched up the right bank of the Basha, and within a mile or so of the joining of the waters came to a small village called Chutran or Garm Pani. The place derives its name of Garm Pani (hot water) from the fact that it boasts the possession of a hot spring, which bubbles up at the foot of the mountains, and I found a pleasant spot to camp in under the shade of a clump of trees, within a hundred yards or so of the spring.

Such was the mouth of the valley of the Basha, and I was at last in the heart of the ibex country,—a strange wild land whose frowning precipices and eternal snows caused one to pause and wonder; a land crowned with towering fastnesses, impregnable strongholds known to the ibex and eagle alone.

CHAPTER III.

IBEX-STALKING.

News of ibex—An unsuccessful stalk—Sunrise on the mountains—Another stalk and a wounded ibex—Bad weather—The post—Poor luck with ibex—Wounded ibex secured—A hard day—More bad weather—A run after a chitah—Murder of an Indian surveyor—A good day's sport—Doko—A rough night in the open Bad weather again—A disappointing stalk—An early start—Trials of ibex-stalking.

I HAD now been marching for seventeen consecutive days, during which time I had covered a distance of upwards of 250 miles over mountain-tracks of all sorts, including no tracks at all (!), and I spent Good Friday enjoying the rest of a lazy idle day in an ideal climate, amid scenery of the most majestic type. I revelled, too, in bathing in the clear water of the hot spring, which was just so hot that one had to be careful not to plunge in too suddenly (!), in spite of the fact that but a few hundred yards above the spring itself the mountain was deep in snow.

I was prepared for a considerable stay in the valley of the Basha in the event of big ibex proving difficult to get at, as seemed probable, and my plan of campaign was to operate on the mountains on each side of the river, moving my camp slowly up the valley in a northern direction, whenever it seemed advisable to try fresh ground. Many were the hard and unsuccessful days

during the ensuing weeks, an account of which would be wearisome and tedious; but which, nevertheless, have to be put up with by any one who would successfully stalk mountain game, and which, after all, enhance the pleasure of a successful day after a large head, which with average luck and perseverance is bound to come sooner or later.

The first few days after my arrival at Garm Pani were devoted to sending out men to spy out the land. From the reports of the different parties I sent out I gathered that there were no big ibex to be seen in the immediate vicinity of Garm Pani, but that several herds containing fine males had been seen farther up the valley; and I therefore crossed the river and moved my camp to the small village of Demal, a few miles farther north.

One evening shortly after my arrival a small herd of ibex, among which were some fine old males carrying good horns, was seen on the rocky heights above camp; and as ibex are generally found in the early morning much in the same place as they have settled in on the previous evening, I arranged to start after them first thing in the morning. Daylight accordingly saw us—Mohammed, Saltana, a Balti, and myself—climbing the steep mountain-slopes, which rise up from the left bank of the river. We were all wearing grass-shoes,—a kind of sandal of rice-straw, of which I had brought sufficient to make some twelve dozen pair from Kashmir,—which I found first-rate foot-gear for walking over rock and bad ground when one's feet have become sufficiently hard not to be chafed by them, as well as for marching through snow. The sun was well up in the heavens before we reached the place where the ibex had been seen the night before, and when we did get there we found signs which told an

unwelcome tale. On a patch of soft earth was distinctly visible the imprint of an ibex-hoof, while close behind it was the pug of a large leopard. We had been forestalled by a beast of a chitah, as the natives call the leopard of these parts, for it was evident that he had but a short time before been in hot pursuit of

Ibex-ground.

the very herd of ibex we were after. Thus ended my first hunt after ibex.

I was not destined to wait long, however, before getting a shot; for late on the evening of the 3rd April a herd was seen from camp, which had been moved on a mile or two, feeding on the mountain-side facing us, and by 4 A.M. on the 4th I was on my way after them. It was a beautiful morning, not a cloud anywhere, and as I set foot on the steep

mountain-side, after crossing the river, there was just that beautiful glow which immediately precedes the dawn. The effect of the sunrise was quite beautiful. As daylight grew, the moon became paler and paler, and then suddenly the highest peaks of the mountains became tipped with a glorious gold. From the peaks the golden hue spread downwards, the deep shades of night retreating silently towards the valley, till at last they vanished, swallowed up in the brilliant splendour of the risen sun. As we got higher and higher, and were approaching the place where the ibex had last been seen, the quick eye of my shikarie detected some animals immediately above us. After reconnoitring with the glass, and finding no big males among them, we proceeded to circumvent them, so as not to disturb them, for fear of their starting off and frightening any others there might be on the ground. After some exciting crawling among some steep rocks, they were successfully passed, and we were then able to spy the ground above. Mohammed soon made out three large males, easily distinguishable by the peculiar dark mark down the centre of the back which denotes an old male, feeding with a herd which was evidently the one we had seen the evening before. They were some way above us, and we had a good long climb before we got on to a level with them; and when we did, we saw from some rocks which we had selected as a good position any number of females and small males; but nowhere could we make out the three big ones. They were evidently not yet settled for the day, so we retired behind our rocks and had breakfast, as Mohammed judged we should see the big males when the rest of the herd began moving off to a place of security for their midday rest.

In this he proved right, for soon after we had

resumed our places among the rocks a large male suddenly appeared, as if he had sprung out of the ground, about 150 yards off. A dispute then arose between Mohammed and myself as to the distance, he maintaining that the animal was not more than 100 yards off, while I considered that he was at least 200. However, as it struck me that if I did not fire pretty quickly he would probably be half a mile away, I gave way and let drive. Imagine my disgust to see my first ibex making off at best pace apparently untouched. In my desperation I fired several more shots as he made off, needless to say without effect. Mohammed, who was gazing at the flying animal through the glass, declared that he was hit by the first shot, but low down. This made me more confident than ever that I had judged the distance correctly, and that in using only the 100-yards sight my bullet had struck low. Anyway, I had the vexation of seeing the first ibex I had ever had a shot at go gaily up the most appalling rocks, and finally out of sight. Nor was I much comforted by Mohammed's assurance that we should find him dead in the course of the next few days. I reached camp in none the best of tempers by three o'clock, Ram Pershad having moved it up to a small village called Dogoro.

On the following morning I awoke after a fearful night to find the ground covered with snow, and a thick mist, accompanied by a steady drizzle, shrouding the whole country to the very foot of the mountains. Luckily Subhana, whom I had sent from Garm Pani to Skardu, the chief village in Baltistan and nearest post-office, a few days' journey from the Basha, turned up during the morning, and gave me something to do reading and writing letters. The postal system which is in vogue between Baltistan, Ladak, and Kashmir is

conducted as follows: A sequence of rough shelters, consisting at times merely of an overhanging rock with the exposed side protected by a rough wall of stones, is established along the main routes between Kashmir and Baltistan, and Kashmir and Ladak, at a uniform distance of four miles. Each runner carries the mail for this distance, which he is supposed to cover in an hour, and then hands it on to the next man, whom he finds in the shelter, which is known as a *dāk*. The mail-runners travel day and night, so that in the course of twenty-four hours the mail has travelled close on 100 miles, which when the nature of the ground traversed is considered is decidedly good. Of course in the winter the mails may be days late owing to storms; and the Zogi La is especially dreaded by the post-runner, for seldom does the winter pass without its levying its toll of the life of at least one mail-runner. While in Baltistan I had all my letters forwarded by the post-master at Srinagar to Skardu, the nearest—indeed I believe the only—post-office in the country. There they were kept till one of my men called for them. It is perhaps unnecessary to add that from a financial point of view the mail systems are run at a considerable loss.

The next day was a long and unsuccessful one; but on my return to camp a villager informed me that he had noticed an unusually large number of birds of prey circling round high on the mountain-side where I had had my shot. This gave me a gleam of hope that they might be circling over the corpse of my ibex, and I sent Saltana off first thing in the morning to see if it was, while I myself went up the mountains on the other side of the river. We made out ibex about ten o'clock, and had a very long stalk after them, not getting within shot till 5 P.M. The sun, which was very near setting behind the mountains on the other side of the valley,

made the light very bad, and I could not make out the big ones at all. However, Mohammed pointed to an animal feeding about 100 yards off, and said he was a big one. Taking a good steady aim with my 400 express, I fired, and down he rolled. I was overjoyed, and was on the point of rushing up to see my prize when another beast came galloping up the hill and stood for a moment opposite us. I took aim as well as I could—for I was now sitting in soft snow, and in a very awkward position—and fired, hitting him far back. He managed to make good his escape for the time, but was afterwards found dead and brought down by a goat-herd. I now made my way to the dead ibex, which had rolled a long way down, and, to my utter disgust when I reached him, found that he was quite a small one, with a head not worth keeping! My feelings can be better imagined than described, and I turned my feet towards camp in very low spirits, for luck seemed to be dead against me. However, the fickle goddess was about to show me the other aspect of her countenance, and that much sooner than I expected. I had scarcely been in camp ten minutes when Saltana returned bearing in triumph the head of my first ibex. The whole aspect of things changed in a moment, and I thought ibex-shooting the best sport in the world! Having carefully measured the length of the horn,—39½ inches with the tips broken, a very fair specimen indeed,—I asked Saltana how he had found it. He said there was no difficulty in seeing where it was, as there were over a hundred birds of prey gloating on the carcass, but that it was a very bad place to get at; and no doubt it was, for it had taken him from sunrise till after 7 P.M. to get it.

On the 8th I was unsuccessful, and the 9th being Sunday, I stayed in camp, but had a hard day on the

10th. Leaving camp soon after 4 A.M., I tried to ascend a mountain-side, high up on which ibex had been seen, by a steep and narrow ravine, for the most part filled with snow. The first hour's walking was tolerably easy, being nothing more than an ordinary stiff climb, and by the time it was light we were some way up the mountain. It was a glorious morning, clear and absolutely still, the silence broken only by the notes of different birds as they welcomed the coming day. After this progress became more difficult, and before long we came to a place which required real hard climbing: hauling oneself up by one's hands, and pulling and pushing one another up great precipitous steps of rock. We went on climbing thus till we got to where Mohammed said he had seen the ibex in the evening, when we advanced with the greatest caution. We were at a great height, and the view all round was magnificent; but the ibex, which were much more important than any view, did not seem to be there, and after peering carefully all round we clambered on to an upstanding rock, from where we could command a better view. Mohammed said he saw ibex a very long way off, which would be the lot we were after, and as they were moving farther and farther away, pursuit was hopeless even had the ground been of a nature practicable for a biped such as man. It being now 11.30 I had some breakfast, and we then prepared to descend. The sun was hot and blocks of snow were perpetually falling from steep rocks, as often as not bringing great boulders with them, and a careful look out had to be kept. On one occasion, on hearing the familiar booming, we looked up to see a huge mass of rock and *débris* tearing down the narrow ravine we were descending. We rushed behind a convenient projection of earth, and not a moment too soon, for at that instant the huge mass swept past, ploughing

up the ground where the moment before we had been walking. Except for a few bruises, from the numerous falls I had taken during the day, we all reached camp safe and sound at three o'clock.

After this I thought I would try fresh ground, and moved camp about six miles up the river to Sesko. It was a dull morning when we started, and soon after midday mist came down, and it was very cold. Later on snow began to fall, and owing to mist and snow there was nothing to do but remain in camp. The night was if anything worse than the day—hurricanes of wind accompanied by snow and bitter cold. My coolies and cook deserted camp during the night, and took refuge with the villagers in their huts. All through the 12th it snowed incessantly, and was bitterly cold. I sat in my tent all day, wrapped up in a *poshteen*, trying to imagine I was enjoying myself; but it required a very vivid imagination. Thursday the 13th showed an improvement, though a good deal of mist hung about in the morning. About one o'clock I took Saltana and a Balti with me to a nullah a mile or two off, leading up to the giant peak Ganchen, 21,000 feet, whose snow-bound heights frowned down upon my camp. I was nearing camp about 5 P.M., having seen nothing, when I heard a great commotion going on. I ran down to see what was up, and on reaching camp discovered from the excited villagers that a large chitah had killed a sheep, and was keeping watch over it about two miles off. It was late, but I decided to have a try for him, and started off full speed. I ran and fell over the rocky ground, and finally, hopelessly out of breath, reached the scene of the kill. Peering over a small patch of thorn-bushes in which the dead sheep lay, I spied the leopard, a real beauty, making off, and seizing hold of my rifle,

tried to draw a bead on him. I had, however, to fire standing owing to the thorn-bushes, and could get nothing to rest the rifle on, and as I was gasping for breath after running and scrambling over broken ground for the best part of two miles, the fore-sight not altogether unnaturally wobbled about over the back-sight, and resisted all my efforts to keep it still in a most aggravating manner. It was like a nightmare; but I saw that in another minute the leopard would be out of sight, so pressed the trigger. The obvious result followed: the leopard whisked his tail and went gaily on, while I sat down and swore! It was half-past six and pretty dark, and if only I had stayed in camp during the afternoon I could have taken things easily, arrived at the kill in broad daylight, and probably bagged the leopard.

The next few days produced nothing, chiefly owing to the weather, which was execrable; and though I saw some good ibex, when I went out in the intervals between the worst of the storms, from one cause or another, was never able to get within shot of them. The 16th and 17th were if possible worse than the 12th, snow and fog without end; and the only event of any excitement which occurred at this time was a murder at Garm Pani, where a native of the place had for some reason or other killed an Indian surveyor who had been sent to these regions, by beating him with a bamboo pole!

At last, however, luck changed once more. The morning of the 18th was as bad as any of its predecessors; but towards midday rain ceased, and the mist began to lift. We immediately got the glasses out to spy the ground revealed by the breaks in the clouds, and it was not long before we made out some good ibex. Fresh snow lay deep on the mountains;

but the herd seemed settled for the day, and that, too, in what had the appearance of being a possible place for a stalk; so I told Mohammed that, provided the mist kept off, we must make an attempt to get at them, for I was utterly sick of staying in camp doing nothing all day. About one o'clock we went, making a considerable detour in order to keep well out of sight. As we got on to the steep mountain-side the going became very bad, for the new snow gave way at every step in the most exasperating manner, and we had a pretty hard time of it. At last we reached the level of the nullah in which we had seen the ibex, and on peering cautiously over a snow-covered ledge, saw them beginning to wake up and look about them. We were crawling carefully on to get into a good position for a shot, when I heard a shrill whistle,—the curious danger-signal of the female ibex,—a sure sign that one of the watchful sentinels had scented danger.

I snatched hold of the rifle, and clambering on to an adjacent rock, made ready. The ibex were slowly climbing what appeared to be a perpendicular cliff, between which and myself was a yawning chasm several hundred feet deep. I soon made out two big males by the peculiar marking of their coats, and waited anxiously for a chance. At last one of them stopped to take a look round, and I fired. No result; but the ibex seemed bewildered, bolted, and then stopped again. Off went my second barrel and down he crashed, falling head over heels into the chasm below. I took my second rifle, but found the other male hidden for the moment by rocks. He soon reappeared, and as he stood for a second I fired. He went on, however, and did not look like giving me another chance, till Mohammed suddenly began barking like a chitah. At this he pulled up, looking round to see where his supposed

enemy might be. The pause was fatal to him; for, taking a full sight, I fired, and backwards he came flying through the air, and never once touched ground till he reached the bottom of the chasm, many hundred feet below. Luckily this was full of soft new snow, into which he fell with a thud, or his horns must have inevitably been smashed to atoms.

Ibex head.

It was just 4.30 P.M., and I of course wanted to examine my trophy; but so precipitous were the sides of the chasm into which he had fallen that we found it impossible to descend from where we were. I therefore sent Saltana and the Balti guide round to get to the bottom from the opposite side, where there was a possible way, while I retraced my steps with all due caution down the treacherous snow-slides, reaching camp at 6 P.M. An hour and a half later Saltana got in with the heads; and great was the excitement among my followers, who crowded round as I drew out the tape to measure them: 40½ and 41½ inches,—two fine heads, worth many days of hard and unsuccessful work, and I retired to rest that night with feelings of the deepest satisfaction.

At last on the 20th I woke to a really fine morning, and was off by 6 A.M. to some ground a few miles from camp, accompanied by Mohammed, Saltana, and a Balti — Moyhut by name — from a small village called Doko, to act as guide. We had a long day's climbing, and saw some fine ibex, but were unable to get near them; so I sent Saltana back to camp in the afternoon to bring the tents to the foot of the mountain I was on, as the herd seemed worth following, and there was no knowing how long it might be before we should succeed in circumventing them. I reached the valley by six o'clock, and at seven a coolie arrived with the *tente d'abri*, and a message from Ram Pershad, saying he would come with the rest of the things in the morning, as he was unable to collect sufficient coolies to bring them that evening.

Moyhut, Balti.

They turned up all right about sunrise, after having had quite an excitement in the evening, when a leopard had approached within fifty yards of camp in search of food, before he was driven away. An extraordinary instinct these beasts seem to have for knowing when the man with the gun is not there!

No one would stir out of camp on the 21st, it being a festival of some sort or another, which was particularly annoying, as it was a lovely day; but on the 22nd we were up and away soon after 4 A.M. after the ibex we had seen on the 20th. We had gone a great way before we saw anything of them, and as there was no prospect of getting back to camp by nightfall if we went on, I sent Moyhut back to get food and blankets. We then went on after the ibex. Having got to within a quarter of a mile or so of the herd, which contained four very fine males, we found we were unable to get any nearer without being discovered, so sat down behind some rocks and watched them for the rest of the afternoon. Towards evening they came down a little, but not enough, and about seven o'clock Moyhut reached us with food and blankets. The thing was now to level a place to sleep on, by no means so easy as might be supposed. However, I found a niche under the lee of a rock, where with the help of our alpenstocks we made a place sufficiently large to admit of a Wolseley valise being spread out, and having placed boulders along the edge to prevent me rolling off when asleep, wrapped ourselves up for the night. We were far above the snow-line, and I had first to scrape away the snow, a trouble which I might just as well have saved myself, for just as I had rolled myself up, the clouds, which had been gathering all the afternoon, burst, and it began to snow. This was unpleasant but could not be helped, and I set to

work on my evening meal. Having had nothing to eat since some cold food at 9 A.M., I felt like enjoying a good hot meal; but as lighting a fire was out of the question, chiefly owing to there being nothing to burn, I had to content myself with the cold chicken and rice-pudding which Ram Pershad had sent up. After this I lay down and was soon asleep on the hardest bed I have ever slept on, for the ground was all rock.

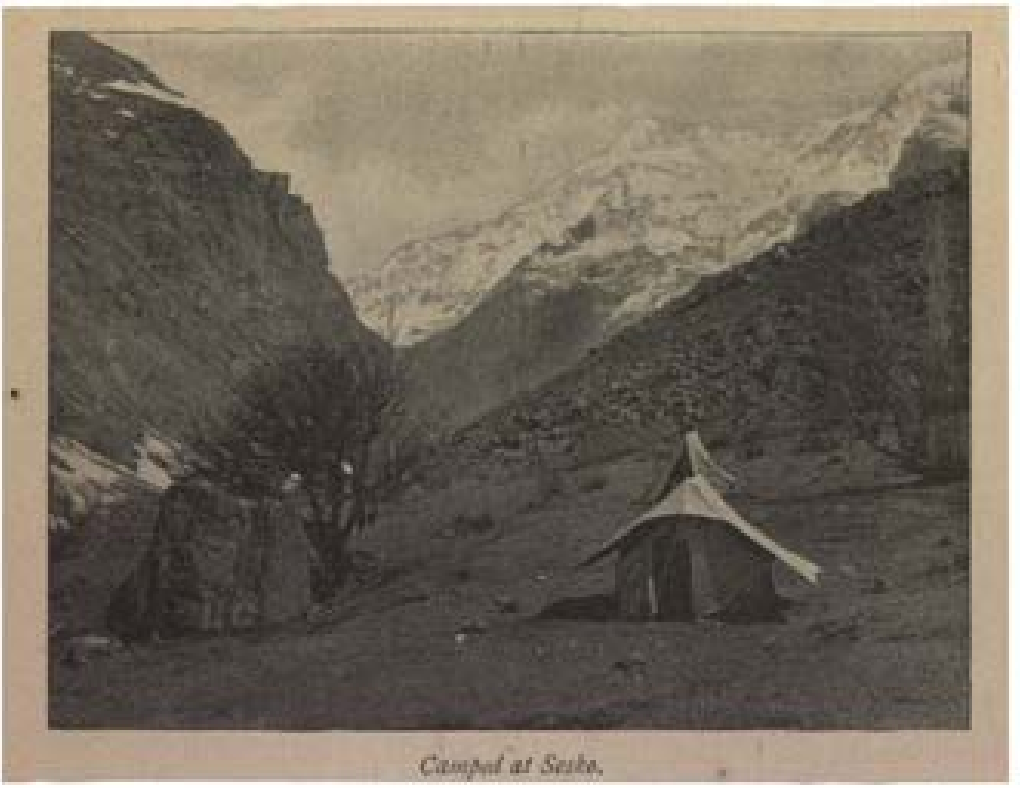
The next thing I remember was a sensation of extreme cold about the head, which disturbed my rest, and as soon as I was thoroughly awake, discovered the cause: it was snowing hard, and I was covered with a very perceptible layer of snow. It certainly was not an ideal night to spend in the open; but I was too sleepy to mind much, and pulling the blankets well over my head, was soon fast asleep again. The next time I woke was just before morning. Snow had ceased falling; but I found a considerable covering enveloped me. I watched it getting lighter and lighter, and it was a fine sight to see the mountains and clouds gradually separate themselves, as the light grew and they became more distinct. When light enough I got up, shook off the snow, and looked about for the ibex. We soon found them; but there had been 3 or 4 inches of snow during the night, and Mohammed said it would be impossible to proceed, as the new snow on the steep rocky ground made it too dangerous. It was terribly annoying after our hard work and rough night, but there was no help for it.

About 9 A.M. feeling hungry, I devoured what was left from the night before, and found everything that could freeze turned to ice. The remains of the rice-pudding had become rice-ice! This would no doubt have been an excellent dish in the tropics, but high up in snow-bound mountains, with a hard frost going on,

it made a chilly breakfast. After this we did the only thing possible under the circumstances—made our way as best we could down the mountain-side, and back to camp, which we reached safely about one o'clock. The next day was a reproduction of many I had had of late—chilling snow and dreary mist; and it was consequently not till the 25th that I was able to make another attempt to reach the coveted ibex. The morning broke fine, and at 9 A.M. I started once more with food and bedding. By one o'clock I reached a tolerably level bit of ground, which I thought would do to sleep on, where I deposited my blankets, and then sent Saltana to the top of a neighbouring peak to spy. Before long he signalled us to come, and on our reaching him, we saw the ibex, who appeared to be in a possible place to stalk, so determined to lose no time in commencing operations against them. We had a long way to go to get near them, and had to cross one or two very awkward places, including several "shoots" in the mountain-side, down which avalanches of rock and *débris* were perpetually being hurled. These places we had to watch carefully, and as soon as a lot had come rushing down, run across as hard as we could to reach the other side before the next avalanche. But the worst place of all was a practically perpendicular wall of frozen snow, which had to be surmounted by cutting step above step with an ice-axe as we went.

At last we got to within a few hundred yards of the herd, and my hopes were high, when a most unlucky chance dashed them to the ground. We were crossing a small stretch of open ground to the edge of a nullah, from where I hoped to get a shot, when a small male, who had apparently been lying wide of the rest, saw us and dashed off, taking the rest of the herd with

him, and the big males never even showed themselves before they were lost to us in the jumble of nullahs and chasms of the mountain. This was fearful luck, for I felt that I at least deserved a shot, after having stalked them hard for nearly a week, and there was now little likelihood of seeing them again, for when once ibex are thoroughly frightened, they go off and leave their ground, at anyrate for a time; so we made our



Camped at Sesko.

way back to camp, which we reached at 7.30 after a hard and unlucky day.

The following morning I moved camp back to Sesko, with a view to going after a big ibex that had been seen high up on the sides of the giant Ganchen. The herd with which he had been seen was a long way off, so as there was a moon I rose at 2 A.M. on the 27th and started before 3 A.M. We tramped along by the

light of a brilliant moon, which gradually paled as it gave way to a still more brilliant day, with few stops till 8 A.M., when we sighted the ibex feeding slowly towards some rocky ground, where they would probably lie down for the day. There was one very fine male among them, and as I looked at him long and carefully through the glass, I became convinced that he was an exceptionally fine animal, and felt sure that he carried a horn of considerably over 40 inches. As there was no chance of stalking them where they were, we sat down to watch and see where they would settle, and I took the opportunity of having some cold breakfast. By twelve o'clock they seemed settled, and were lying scattered over a large stretch of rocky ground, sleeping. It was a difficult place to approach, as a huge open slope lay between them and us, over which we had to crawl in sight of the whole herd, making the most of what cover there was in the way of small bushes and inequalities in the ground. After much patient crawling, which was both exciting and painful, we got across the exposed hillside successfully, and crouched down on the skirts of the rocky ground where the herd was still peacefully lying. After a short rest for breath, we loaded the rifles and were beginning to crawl cautiously on, when there was a sudden and unexpected puff of wind from behind us. The result was immediate and exasperating, the whole herd, just out of shot, springing up and making quickly off in the opposite direction. I ran on in the hopes of cutting them off; but when I next saw them they were far above, gazing down in the direction of the unseen danger.

Such are the trials of ibex-shooting; and it being nearly three o'clock, we were obliged to make our way back to camp, which we reached soon after six, having been going since two in the morning.

GOAT-HERD'S HUTS IN THE MOUNTAINS.

The next two days were spent in much the same way, and equally unsuccessfully, so on the 30th I moved camp farther up the river to Bisil, a small village in the middle of which bubbled up a hot sulphur spring, much patronised as a public bath by the villagers—a fact which deterred me from bathing in it myself, for the Baltis are not a cleanly race. Prospects of sport seemed to be good, for during the day a goat-herd came down to the village with news of a red bear which he had seen, and also of ibex up a side valley, the stream from which flowed into the Basha at Bisil.

CHAPTER IV.

IBEX AND SNOW-BEARS.

A wild camp—A snow-bear killed—A crawl over a glacier and death of another snow-bear—Rapacity of vultures—Benighted—After ibex again—Bivouacking on the edge of a glacier—An exciting stalk, and successful issue—Another ibex shot—Waiting for bears—A deluge at Bisil—Unrewarded vigils—Return to Sesko—A night on giant Ganchen—Unrewarded search for the big ibex—Back to Garm Pani.

THE news I had received, if reliable, was good, and at 4 A.M. on May the 1st I started off to try and find the bear before he secreted himself for the day. It was not long before I found his tracks; but failing to find Bruin himself, I made my way farther up the nullah to look for ibex. I soon found them on the rocky northern face of the nullah, and as they seemed to be in a good place for a stalk, was soon climbing after them. By the time I had got to within half a mile or so of the herd, however, one of the many difficulties which beset the hunter of mountain game presented itself. The wind blew perversely and steadily from the wrong direction. If the position taken up by the animal is favourable, the wind is almost certain to be wrong; if the wind is good, the animal is equally certain to be in an impossible place. To add to our difficulties it now

came on to snow heavily, and all further prospects of stalking the ibex had to be abandoned.

By about two o'clock I reached camp, which had followed me from Bisil, and was pitched on the only level patch of ground in the vicinity, a few miles up the tributary stream. A fine wild spot it was: 100 yards or so almost straight below our tents rushed a roaring mountain torrent; sheer up behind

View taken from camp in May.

and in front rose walls of snow-clad mountains, towering to the very heavens; and all round grew hardy stunted cedars and other scrub, while scattered here and there, wherever the snow had melted, large patches of strongly aromatic wormwood flourished. Such was the situation of my camp when I reached it on this cold May day.

Towards evening snow ceased, and I sallied forth

again to look for bear. I waited patiently in the neighbourhood of the tracks I had passed in the morning, till six o'clock, without his putting in an appearance, when I gave it up and started back for camp. I had not gone more than a few hundred yards when Mohammed, who was with me, said he saw something on the far side of the stream, but could not make out what it was. On examining it through the glass, we made out three bears! We could not get out of their sight, but watching them carefully, crawled rapidly towards them when their heads were turned away. They were making their way slowly down towards the stream on one side, so we did the same on the other, and when I got as near as I dare go, I took the rifle and waited for an opportunity. It was getting very dark; but before long the largest of the three gave me a broadside, which I immediately took advantage of. The bear did not seem to mind, so I fired again, and this time down she rolled to the edge of the stream. I was soon reloaded, and in another minute down came number two. On crossing the stream I found them dead close together on a platform of old piled-up snow. One was a fine old bear with beautiful fur, but the other was a cub. It was too dark to skin them, so we left them where they were till morning, and returned to camp well satisfied with the day's work.

The morning of the 2nd was spent in skinning the bears and cleaning and drying the skins. The fur was in the best possible condition, being very long and silvery in colour; in fact at no other time of the year does the red bear or snow-bear—a much more appropriate name, in my opinion—carry such a beautiful coat as in the spring and early summer.

Later in the day I went out but saw nothing. In May at least I had expected fine weather, but the morning of the 3rd was as bad as any of its predecessors, heavy mist hanging on the mountains, accompanied by very heavy rain. Camp was pitched at an altitude of something like 10,000 feet, and the winter snow lay deep all round, making it very cold in bad weather.

About one o'clock the mist lifted a little, and we saw the same ibex we had been after on the 1st. They were tolerably low down, and I at once went after them. Unfortunately they discovered us while still some way off, and I only got a snap-shot at a long range as they sped into the mist above.

The next day, there being no game visible near camp, I thought I would explore farther up the nullah. Small herds of ibex were to be seen here and there on the northern faces, but nothing worth troubling about, and by 3.30 we reached the foot of a glacier. About a mile ahead the nullah split into two, almost at right angles, so I told Saltana and a Balti to follow the right hand, while Mohammed and I made for the left. We had gone some way up the glacier, which much resembled a very rough and choppy sea in a state of solidity, when Mohammed pointed out a number of birds of prey perched on a frozen mass of snow and *débris*. "There must be something there," he said, and we loaded the rifle. We then crawled cautiously along,—not a particularly amusing method of progression on this sort of ground,—looking carefully over each ridge of snow and ice as we came to it. On peering over one of these ridges, close to where the birds were perched, Mohammed drew back quickly, muttering in a hoarse whisper, "Bear." I took the rifle and wriggled to the top

of the ridge, inwardly anathematising all glaciers, and this one in particular, for nobs of ice and projections of *débris* were claiming their "pound of human flesh," and having at length fairly wriggled on to the top, beheld not 30 yards off a big snow-bear comfortably ensconced in a hole in the snow, while between his fore-paws were the remains of an ibex! The cause of the vultures' anxiety was now apparent, for all that remained of the ibex was the skull and horns. An unexpected treat, however, was in store for them. I took a steady aim and fired, but thought the bullet went over him, so fired the second barrel to make certain, and he never moved again. He was a very fine fellow with a magnificent coat of fur, and the ibex-head was a very fair one with a fine symmetrical pair of horns—a case of killing two birds with one stone. I may here mention that on passing this spot two days later, every morsel of the bear, beyond the bare skeleton, had gone, the bones being as clean and white as if they had been there for days instead of a few hours;—but this is by the way.

I was still admiring my trophy when Saltana came running up, saying that he had seen some good ibex, and thought we might get to them before dark. In this, as was afterwards apparent, he made an error of judgment—a not uncommon occurrence among Kashmiris when "the wish is father to the thought," though it is seldom, certainly, that the wish of a Kashmiri errs on the side of exertion. Off we went as hard as we could go, over ice and snow, rock and *débris*, up precipitous cliffs that would make one think twice if less excited, till at last at 6.30 we spied the ibex still a long way off. Night was fast approaching, and any attempt to go farther was obviously out of the question. Camp was by now a very long way

off, and the worst of it was, there was no moon, so that before long we were in pitch darkness. It was not a pleasant position, benighted on the precipitous mountain-sides of a pathless nullah. There was a lot of very bad ground to be got over, and we fell about terribly, and before very long my grass-shoes wore through and I had to discard them, leaving myself absolutely bootless, much to the detriment of my feet. I thought we should never get back, and when at last we sighted our camp fires in the distance, we shouted and hallooed till at length we saw lights approaching, and in a short time men with lanterns had reached us, and we accomplished the remaining distance between us and camp with comparative ease, getting in at eleven o'clock. I spent the next day superintending the curing of the bear-skin, which was a beauty, not altogether sorry to have a day's rest.

On the 6th we left camp at 4.30 A.M., and having reached and crossed the glacier where I had shot the bear, moved up the left-hand nullah from the point where the glacier became divided into two. About 8 A.M. we made out ibex, and after a short stalk got within shot; but just as I pulled the trigger the male I was firing at sprang forward, and the bullet struck the rock behind him. When I put the glass on to him I saw that he did not carry very big horns, and was not altogether sorry that I had missed him.

It being nearly ten o'clock, I had breakfast, and then sent the Balti guide back to camp to fetch food and blankets to the foot of the glacier, as I meant to try and find the herd I had been after two days before, and had no intention of having another night march like the one I had already experienced. In spite of all underfoot being ice and snow, the sun

overhead was very hot, and the shade of a rock in which to rest during the middle of the day was very welcome.

At 2.30 we began spying the ground, and before long made out a herd moving down the mountain-side not far from the place in which we had last seen the ibex on the 4th, and started to stalk them. They were in a tolerably good place, and as we approached the ground where we had last seen them, we proceeded with great caution, looking carefully over every ridge as we came to it. The ibex, however, were nowhere to be seen, and we eventually saw them far above in their beloved rocks, evidently disturbed by something, though it seemed impossible that they could have discovered us.

It was too late to do anything more, so we made our way to the foot of the glacier, where we found the Balti with food and bedding, which he had deposited in a small clump of dead trees by the side of an icy torrent flowing from the glacier. We soon had some wood cut and a good fire blazing, over which I cooked my dinner, a simple meal consisting of a tin of "army rations," an excellent form of tinned food when one is bivouacking out. Very soon afterwards I wrapped myself up in my blankets, and the last thing I saw before unconsciousness stole over me was the vast black vault of heaven pierced by myriads of stars of a brilliance only to be seen through the dry and rarified air of a lofty altitude.

When I awoke the stars were just beginning to pale at the first faint signs of dawn. It was a little after 4 A.M., so I got up, and soon had water boiling and tea made. Everything was as hard as iron, showing how severe the frost had been during the night; but, owing no doubt to the extraordinary dryness and stillness of the air, the cold was hardly perceptible. At five

o'clock I sent Saltana and the Balti up to the right of the glacier to spy, while Mohammed and I went up the mountain-side immediately above where we had slept. There was nothing to be seen on our ground, and we got back to the foot of the glacier by 8 A.M., where I remained to spend a lazy Sunday. At 4 P.M. Saltana got back, having seen nothing, so we made our way back to camp, and just before dark spied the herd we had seen on the 1st on the mountain-side opposite our tents.

"Char baggi, sahib." Four o'clock? I turned over in my warm blankets and yawned. It was so comfortable where I was, and it looked so cold and comfortless outside; why should I leave my comfortable bed at this unearthly hour in the morning to go climbing and falling about among rocks and snow? Then I thought of the ibex I had seen in the evening—one certainly a very fine one. Off went the blankets, and in less than half an hour I was dressed and on my way up the steep mountain-side.

We were getting near the place where we had seen the ibex settle in the evening, when suddenly up sprang a beast from some hidden hollow in front of us and darted off. I rammed cartridges into the rifle and ran to the top of a ridge just a little ahead. Looking up, I saw above me a pair of horns! There was a lot of high rank grass where I was, and when I had raised myself as far as I dare, I could only make out a head, surmounted by a pair of horns, staring apparently straight at me. I did not dare wait for fear he should be off, so fired at the grass, exactly below the head. By the time the smoke had cleared the head had vanished, and I did not see it again, at least not for some days. Running to the top of the next ridge, I saw two males and a female making off up the mountain.

Taking the magazine, I drew a bead on the nearest and waited for him to stop, which he very shortly did. I fired, and seeing that he was badly hit, turned my attention to the other, which was climbing among the rocks, now some way off. I put the "peep-sight" up to 200 yards, and as soon as I got a fair chance fired. I saw the dust fly below him, so aimed at the top of his back, but could not make out where the bullet went, so fired again. This time he staggered, and I felt sure that he was hit; but he still went on, so again I aimed right at the top of his back, and this time down he came with a crash. I watched his fall with my heart in my mouth, and fairly trembled when at one period in his downward course he dropped well over 100 feet through the air without touching a thing. When he did at last come to a stop, his skull was split in two and his body a jelly; but by wonderful good luck his horns were hardly injured. I now went and gave a *coup de grâce* to the other, which was making a vain endeavour to climb the rocks above us. The one I had first fired at was found a few days afterwards by the Balti, so that the total result of the morning's work was three good heads, and all finished by 8 A.M., when I got back to camp and sat down comfortably to breakfast. Truly a day of good luck, though I felt that it was quite time for one.

I now thought of returning to Bisil, and on the morning of the 9th told Ram Pershad to take camp there, while I myself, starting at 4.30 A.M., made my way to a nullah between my present camp and the Basha, which was said to hold bears. The information appeared to be correct, for I soon came upon the tracks of two bears, which I followed up the nullah. After going some way I spied ibex, and continuing to follow the tracks of the bears, soon found myself above them,

Alakoo. Khoda Bux. Bahi. Sahiba. Bahi. Ram Pershad.

Bahi. Bahi. Mahammed. Bahi. Bahi.

MY FOLLOWERS IN BALTISTAN.

in a good place to watch them from. They were the most accommodating lot of ibex I have ever come across, for they very soon began feeding upwards, and straight towards us. I lay down in a comfortable position, and when they had approached to within 100 yards or so, easily picked off the biggest male of the herd. He had not a very long horn, though a very thick one.

After having skinned and cut up the ibex, I continued following the tracks of the bears till I came to a nullah overgrown with thickets of thorn-bush. It seemed more than likely that they would be lying hidden in the dense undergrowth for the day, so I took up a commanding position and waited for the evening. Heavy clouds had been gathering all day, and towards dusk down came the rain. By 6 P.M. no bears having put in an appearance, I made my way down to Bisil as fast as I could.

The next few days gave me good cause for suspecting the approach of a second flood. Hour after hour the rain beat down with steady persistency, and I went to sleep at night and woke again in the morning to the endless patter, patter, patter of the rain-drops as they drummed with maddening monotony on my soaked and sodden tent. Here is an extract written on the 13th: "Poured all last night, and things are becoming desperate. My tent is pitched in a morass—that is the state the ground is reduced to by the incessant rain. The poor apricot-trees, which had all come out into full blossom before the rain began, look very draggled and sorry for themselves."

At last on the 15th it began to clear. Before the recent deluge bears had, according to the villagers, been in the habit of raiding their fields of barley by night, so as there was a moon I went and lay in wait for

them. Two nights I watched the stars steer their course across the heavens; but never a bear was there to be seen, and on the 17th, being sick of looking for phantom bears, struck camp and started down the Basha. On reaching Sesko I halted and waited for my camp to come up, as I still had the big ibex of Mount Ganchen in my mind's eye, and meant to have one last try to get a shot at him. The snow had retreated a long way up the mountains since I had last been here, and the trees and shrubs by the river were now a vivid green. It was a cloudless day, and the sun in the valley was very hot; but the scenery all round was magnificent. Overhead the heavens, a vast expanse of azure blue; then came the pure white peaks of glistening snow; below them the dark, black, gloomy-looking mountains, and all around me at my feet terrace upon terrace of bright green barley, cut up in every direction by countless irrigation channels of sparkling water; the whole presenting a scene of vivid colouring and brilliant contrasts such as even imagination seldom paints.

Camp having arrived, I told Mohammed to go some way up the mountain with food and bedding, and I would follow him after dinner. Soon after seven o'clock I started by the light of a glorious moon to make my way up into the heights of the great lonely mountain. After climbing steadily for some time I made out a small patch of light in a nullah far above, and on reaching it found it was a blazing fire, round which were seated Mohammed and the Baltis. The fire was welcome, for there was a sharp feeling in the air which felt like frost, and after having sat for some time gazing on the wonderful moonlight picture all round, I rolled myself up in my blankets close by it and was soon fast asleep. At 4 A.M. Saltana woke me, and by

CAMPED IN THE BASHA NULLAH

five we were on our way. I hoped to get above the place where we had generally seen the ibex before, as the snow which had then made such a proceeding impossible was now melted. By seven o'clock we had reached a great height, and looking down a rocky precipice below us, made out ibex. I thought I made out the big one, but they were lying in deep shadow, and I could not be certain. Before long they got up and began moving towards some ground below them to feed. The conditions were favourable for a stalk, and following them carefully, we got to within about 80 yards, when they became uneasy and began to make off. I watched them all anxiously as one by one they came into full view; but nowhere was the big one to be seen, and I did not fire. We searched the whole mountain-side with the glasses; but beyond the ibex we had been stalking there was nothing to be seen. The "muckle" big one must have left for other parts.

It being now ten o'clock I made a fire under a rock and cooked a meal, after which we started down again, coming across the tracks of a bear on our way, which decided me to stay where I was till evening on the chance of seeing him. Nothing came of it, and by nightfall I got back to camp at Sesko. The next morning—the 19th—I got up at 3 A.M., and telling Ram Pershad to strike camp and take it to Chutran at the mouth of the Basha, went with Mohammed to look for the bear whose tracks we had seen. It proved to be one more unsuccessful bear-hunt, for we saw nothing, and I then marched on to Chutran (Garm Pani). All the bridges over the Basha which the natives use in winter and early spring had been washed away,—for Basha was angry and swollen with melting snows,—and we consequently had to keep to one side

of the river, which necessitated the crossing of some pretty awkward places. Still there were no casualties, and by one o'clock I found myself once more camped amid the pleasant surroundings of Garm Pani. In the evening, when the sun went down, I wallowed in the

In the Basha nullah.

hot spring, rejoicing in the luxury of such a spacious tub.

From Garm Pani I marched fourteen miles, camping for the night on the banks of the Shigar, and settled to go from here to Skardu myself, and to send Mohammed with the greater part of the camp straight on to the village of Kiris, at the confluence of the waters of the Indus and Shayock rivers, which place I should pass through on my way to Ladak.

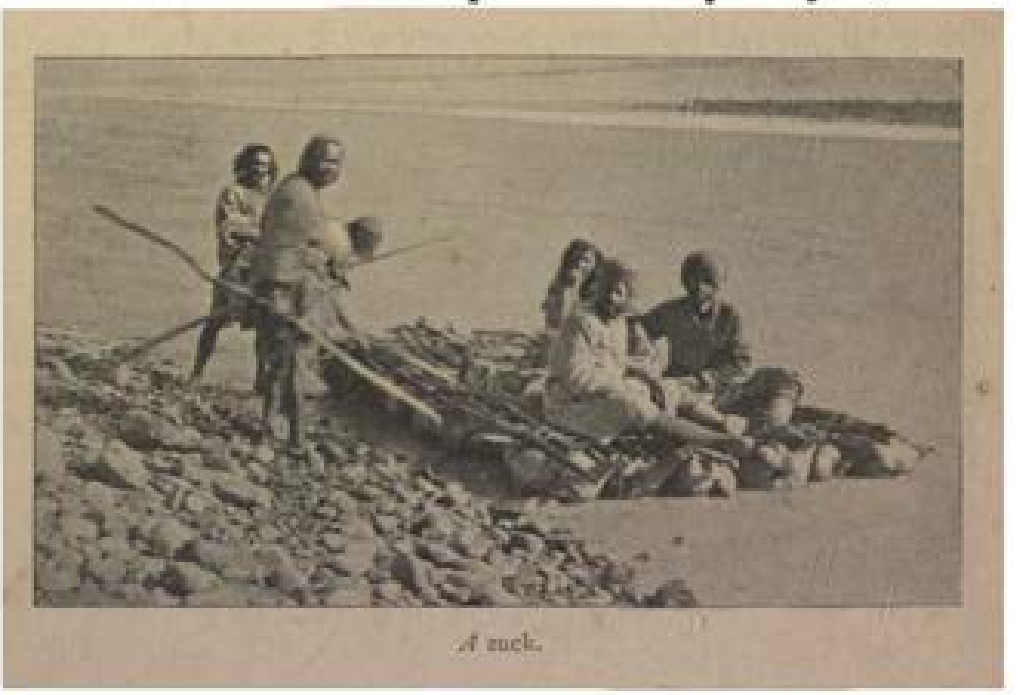
CHAPTER V.

FROM THE BASHA TO LEH.

Down the Shigar on a *zuck*—Arrival at Skardu—A white man—The capital—An old friend—Skardu to Kiris—Thoughtless proceeding of an angry torrent—Arrival at Kapaloo—Welcomed by the rajah—The royal pipe—A day's stalking with the rajah—Unsuccessful stalk after *sharpoo*—Night in the open—*Sharpoo* missed—March up the Shayock—Camped at 16,000 feet—Crossing the Chorbat La—Tobogganning down a snow-slide—Ladak—The headman of Hannoo—Funeral rites as practised in Ladak—Hannoo to Shinbichian—Hard marching—Monster prayer-wheel—*Mani* wall—Reach Leh.

NEAR to where I was camped I found some Baltis with a *zuck* or raft of inflated skins, and as Skardu is situated on the banks of the Indus, close to where the Shigar flows into it, it struck me that it would be a pleasant change to float down the river instead of tramping the thirty miles along the hot and sandy river-banks, and I accordingly approached the owners, who agreed to take me down the next day. A little before 5 A.M. four men were to be seen shouldering the *zuck*, which had the appearance of being distinctly light and fragile, ready inflated, and by five o'clock it was on the water and we made a start. The Shigar was in flood from the snow which had been melting daily for the last two months, and as the raftsmen had nothing but sticks with which to guide it, things soon became exciting. First we would go forward for a bit right enough, but this was

not to last long; and suddenly we whirled round, and, before we knew where we were, were racing down the current backwards at furious speed. Sideways and cornerways also seemed to be favourite methods of progression, and every now and then we would get into a whirlpool and be spun round like a top till our worthy raftsmen managed to get us out of it and into the downward current once more. The skins, too, reminded one more often than not of punctured bicycle tyres, and



A zuck.

necessitated the men spending a large portion of their time flat on their faces blowing them out. Occasionally this method of keeping the thing afloat was not sufficient, and we had to get to land to allow of its being thoroughly inflated again. I landed at the village of Shigar, where I awaited the arrival of the coolies with camp. They turned up about two o'clock, and having given Mohammed final instructions as to awaiting my arrival at Kiris, I intrusted myself once more to the *zuck*. The voyage from Shigar to Skardu differed in no

respects from the first part of the journey; and floating down the Shigar to the Indus, we crossed the latter and landed opposite, which left us a walk of a couple of miles or so to the capital. Here I found a white man—the first I had seen since March—who had been shooting in the neighbourhood, and I do not think I am saying too much when I say that our joy was mutual. We dined together and sat up quite late comparing our experiences, &c.; but he went off early the next morning, and I regret to say I never discovered his name. I also heard that an old friend of mine, Mr J. A. Halliday of the 11th

Houses in Skardu.

Hussars, was shooting somewhere not very far off, and at once sent off a messenger to try and find him, with a note telling him of my arrival at Skardu.

Skardu, as I have before mentioned, is the chief place in Baltistan, and boasts a post-office and a postmaster who, I found, could speak a little English. It is not much more in other respects than the ordinary village of Baltistan, situated in the fine wild scenery common to the country, though the possession of a small bazaar with a few shops, and of a fort which stands on the summit of a precipitous cliff commanding the village and the Indus,

perhaps gives it a claim to a certain superiority over the rest.

During the course of the day I managed to unearth a Balti who volunteered to perform the operation of cutting my hair, which he managed successfully, as far as removing hair went. It had not been cut for twelve weeks, and was in a horrible state. Later on the Tesildah (native official) turned up to pay his "*salaams*," bringing with him an offering of green tea and divers other things of a somewhat similar nature. Towards evening I saw the figure of a European coming towards my tent, and concluding that it must be Halliday, went out to meet him. I was awfully pleased to see him, but we were both so amused by one another's appearance that for the first few minutes we could not speak for laughing. He came in true gipsy fashion, with nothing but *pyjamas*—I do not mean to say he was wearing nothing else—and a blanket. However, that was a matter of no importance, as after dinner we ejected the table and chair from my tent, and having divided my bedding, he slept comfortably on the ground. The next morning Halliday, who had walked twenty miles to come and dine, left again for his camp; and after accompanying him for the first five or six miles, I returned to Skardu, which place I left between four and five o'clock the next morning, getting a pony to ride for the first time since leaving Srinagar.

Walking and riding alternately, I reached the village of Gol, distant about twenty miles, by midday, and camped for the night. Leaving Gol as usual early in the morning, I came to the junction of the Indus and Shayock rivers after a walk of four or five miles. Here there was some delay while a *zuck* was being got ready to take us across, for my route now lay up the banks of the Shayock. A couple of miles farther

and I found myself at Kiris, and Mohammed with the main part of my camp pitched in a pleasant spot in the shade of an orchard. It was very hot, so I spent the middle of the day where I was, and in the afternoon, when it began to get cooler, marched on for another nine miles.

On the 26th I walked about five miles in the morning, reaching the village of Kunis, and as it was again a grilling day, rested under the shade of some welcome trees while camp went slowly on. At 4 P.M. I continued along the dry and sandy banks of the river till I reached a village called Braggar at half-past six. Here the Thullé stream runs into the Shayock from the north, and I impressed a villager to show me the bridge. He took us some way down the river; but when we got to where the bridge ought to have been, there was no bridge to be seen! Fording was out of the question, as the river was an angry, foaming torrent, rushing along with all the force produced by the rapid melting of many thousand tons of accumulated snow. I abused the villager roundly; but he swore that the bridge had been there in the morning, and there was nothing to be done but to tramp wearily up the river to a spot some miles higher up, where there was said to be another. On reaching the place we were lucky enough to find that this bridge had not as yet succumbed to the fury of the flood, and we crossed in safety, to find camp pitched a little farther on, close to the village of Dowany. It seemed that the bridge must have been washed away just before we reached it, for the coolies with my camp had crossed by it earlier in the afternoon.

The next morning, Saturday the 27th, I got off by 5.15, and after marching about nine miles, crossed

the Shayock on a *zuck*, and a mile farther on came to the flourishing village of Kapaloo. I was resting under some trees, awaiting the arrival of my camp, when a servant of the Rajah of Kapaloo, the ruler of this part of the Shayock valley, approached to pay his respects, and informed me that the rajah himself was on his way to welcome me, and shortly afterwards his Highness turned up accompanied by a following of twenty men. Borrowing a couple of rupees from his servant, he placed them in the palm of his hand, which he then held out to me. I was rather taken aback, but luckily did the right thing without in the least knowing it — merely touching them, when he returned them to his servant. I subsequently discovered that this is the usual method of bidding welcome in these parts, a whole bowlful of rupees being sometimes presented, which must be accepted and then returned.

The rajah now motioned to one of his retainers to place a cloth on the ground beneath the tree under which I had been sitting, and we sat down to talk. After a few commonplace remarks on either side conversation began to hang, as he of course could not speak English, and I was hardly qualified to keep up a brisk conversation in Hindustani, which he appeared to speak tolerably well. Luckily, just when the prolonged silence was beginning to become awkward, Ram Pershad turned up and sat down to interpret. The audience lasted long, and during the course of it the rajah smoked a huge pipe, handed to him by a retainer who apparently filled the office of chief pipe-bearer. At length he got up and said he would show me a good place to pitch my tents; so we walked on together, and about a mile distant came to the camping-ground. He did not seem in-

clined to go, so I offered him a cup of cocoa. He said he did not know what it was, but would like to try a cup very much; so we had cocoa. Still he did not move; and as it was now two o'clock, and he had been with me ever since eleven, I intimated that I was tired after my march and would like to rest. He then departed. If I thought I was now at liberty for the remainder of the day I was

The Rajah of Kapaloo smoking the royal pipe.

greatly mistaken. At 5 P.M. the rajah returned, and not only did he bring himself back, but he brought his tea with him! He sat down in my tent, and then ordered tea, which was in a curiously shaped samovar of copper inlaid with silver, to be poured out. It was tea from Lhassa, made in the Tibetan fashion, and as it was the first time I had ever seen or drunk tea made in this way, I was much interested.

Tea when made thus has more the appearance of cocoa, being thick and of a fine pink colour.

The next day, being Sunday, I spent quietly in camp, receiving a visit from the rajah in the evening. He informed me that one of the men whom he had sent out to look for game had returned, having seen some *sharpoo* (*Ovis Vignei*), and added that if I would care to go out after them, he would himself accompany me in the morning. Accordingly at 5 A.M. the next morning we set out, the rajah as usual accompanied by his twenty followers, and, somewhat to my annoyance, dressed entirely in white—not the best colour to set about stalking wild animals in. The place where the game had been seen was about four miles off, and every half mile or so the rajah stopped to rest, on each of which occasions the royal pipe-bearer had to make ready the royal pipe for his Highness to indulge in a puff or two of smoke. The pipe was then handed on to all the royal suite in turn, each taking two or three mouthfuls, and salaaming profoundly as his turn came.

At last we came to the ground where the game had been seen, and the rajah now insisted on taking charge of affairs himself. He had already sent Mohammed on with one of his own men to spy, and by the time we arrived on the scene of action neither of these two men were anywhere to be seen, and we wandered aimlessly about for the greater part of what was left of the morning, hoping to come across one or other of the two shikaries. There was no sign of any game. At last, when I had begun to wonder if I could by any means return to camp without offending my host, the two shikaries were descried a long way off, and one of the ubiquitous suite was sent off to find out if anything had been seen. Nothing had. However, the rajah, in

no way daunted, remarked that the game could not have left the ground, and sent his followers round to drive the hillside. Then followed yelling and noise enough to drive any game there might have been within a radius of half-a-dozen miles clean away, while the rajah himself conducted me to a place past which he said the game must come. Of course nothing did come, and we retired to the shade of a friendly tree to rest and drink tea. Men were sent flying off to various points to spy; but nothing having been seen by four o'clock, we started homewards.

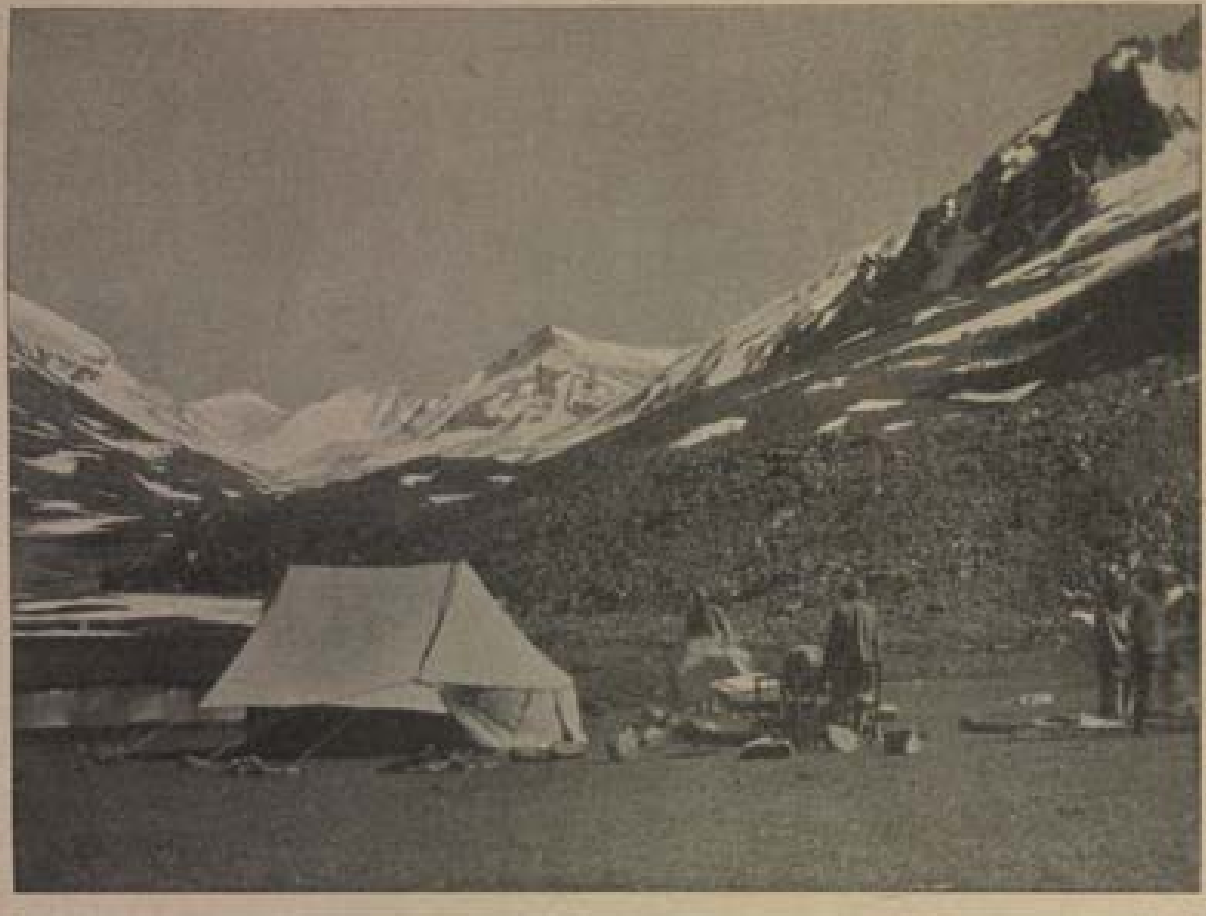
Thus ended one of the most curious day's stalking it has been my lot to take part in. I do not for a moment wish to abuse or ridicule my worthy host, who was doing his best, I knew, according to his lights, to amuse me; but thinking that I was more likely to get sport if I conducted operations myself, I pleaded anxiety to get on to Leh, where I hoped to find letters awaiting me, and at 9 A.M. on the 30th he came to bid me farewell.

I marched across some hills for about eight miles, when I again reached the Shayock, and after crossing it, another mile brought me to the tiny village of Abadon. Here I heard from the villagers of *sharpoo*, and at 2 P.M. started climbing the mountains immediately above the village. The ground was steep, and as we climbed till four o'clock with few halts, we reached a very fair height, and very soon after spied some *sharpoo*, which we proceeded to stalk. The stalk, however, proved a failure, and resulted in my only getting a snap-shot as they moved off. We had had a very hard day, and Mohammed said he would stay and sleep where he was. I would willingly have done likewise, for I was pretty well exhausted; but I had no blankets or food, and pangs of hunger induced me

to make my way down to camp at Abadon. Just before reaching camp a heavy storm of rain came on, and by the time I reached my tent I was in anything but an angelic temper. I slept the clock round pretty successfully, and took some waking then, and did not leave camp till after midday, when I started for the place where I had left Mohammed, taking a couple of coolies carrying food and blankets with me. I saw nothing worth shooting during the day, and when dark came on lay down under an overhanging rock for the night. Before long it began to rain, and the rock afforded no shelter whatever, as the rain of course came from the open side, and I was devoutly glad when it proved to be only a passing storm, for bivouacking in heavy rain is far from pleasant. By five o'clock I was off to spy the ground, and by six discovered a small lot of *sharpoo* high above us.

We had a stiff climb, and then found we could get no nearer for want of cover. After watching them for some time, they moved over a ridge and we ran on. We came upon them suddenly and at unexpectedly close quarters, and seizing the rifle, I aimed at the only male I could see. Unluckily just as I was about to fire he whipped round and made off; but my finger was on the trigger, and though I saw he was turning, I could not stop myself from firing, and the bullet struck the rock behind him. He never gave me another chance, being out of sight in no time.

I spent the night at Abadon, and at 4 A.M. on June 2 struck camp and marched up the Shayock. Saltana was ill with pains in his back and could not walk fast, so had to follow as best he could. I treated him for lumbago, and gave him Dover's powders in the evening, which had a wonderful effect, completely curing him. Six miles from Abadon I crossed the river, thus regain-



CAMPED AT 16,000 FEET.

ing the southern bank, and at ten o'clock halted, having marched some fourteen miles, and continuing up the Shayock in the afternoon for another four miles, reached the village of Chorbat, where I camped for the night. After this I left the Shayock and struck into the mountains to the south. All day long on the 3rd I was ascending steadily, great masses of barren mountain, rising in every direction range upon range, becoming visible as I got higher and the view became less confined. At length by 5 P.M. I came to a level patch of ground on the edge of the snow-line, and here pitched the tents at a height of about 16,000 feet. The sunset was one of the most beautiful I have ever seen, the tips of the mountains becoming a lovely rose colour, which gradually faded as the sun sank lower and lower, and the stars began to peep out with extraordinary brilliance. There was a swamp of water formed by the melting snow near my tent, and as night approached I watched it turn to ice.

The next morning I got up at 3.30, and was off by 4.15. It was pretty cold, and a small stream of water near my tent was frozen over. The air, too, at this height was very rarefied, and we were frequently obliged to stop to get our breath. As we neared the summit of the pass in front of us the ascent became steeper; but the snow was frozen solid, so that the going was, comparatively speaking, good. The last half mile or so leading to the top consisted of a steep snow-slide in which we had to cut steps as we went, and when about half-way up I dropped my alpenstock, which promptly slid down the snow at lightning speed, vanishing finally in an abyss below—a vivid warning of what our own fate would be if we were to make a false step. I reached the summit of the pass—16,700 feet—at 7.15, and all round looked down on

a perfect sea of mountains, with their glistening snow-clad peaks shining in the early morning sun. The first part of the descent was identical with the last part of the ascent, and it struck me that the shortest and easiest way of accomplishing it would be to sit down and let oneself go. Accordingly Saltana and I sat down, and holding tightly on to one another, let go. This rapid motion through the air was at first both

The Chorbat La, 16,700 feet.

pleasing and exhilarating; but the snow was frozen to the consistency of ice, and stopping quite out of the question, with the result that by the time we got to the bottom of the snow-slide I was anything but pleased! The seat of my breeches was a thing of the past, and so, alas! was a considerable portion of my own external tegument, and sitting down was painful for many days afterwards! As soon as ever we were able

to pull up we did so, and after this continued the descent by the more ordinary method of walking. It was a long and tiring tramp, and I did not get to Hannoo, the first village on the Ladak side of the pass, till 11.45—seven and a half hours of climbing, scrambling, sliding, falling, and walking, with only two halts of ten minutes each.

At last I was in Ladak, and what a curious, quaint, fantastic land it was! I do not mean to say that by merely crossing a range of mountains I had got into a land physically different from the country I had left, for the actual scenery was much the same,—the same gigantic mountains in every direction, with the same snow-clad peaks and sombre black rocks; but the people, and their customs and their religion and their works, surely they are the quaintest and most fantastic race of human beings in the world! First the *kusdar* or headman of the district came and paid his respects. He was a most odd-looking individual, and more like the unreal creation of a pantomime than anything else I have ever seen. He was a large and pompous man, of very dark complexion, dressed in a long loose gaudy-coloured robe, tied in at the waist, and wearing a small dome-shaped cap, from beneath which hung a magnificent pigtail. Indeed all the people wore pigtails except the women, who wore a still more curious head-dress known as a *perīk*, and they seemed as much amused and interested in me as I was in them; for as I sat on the ground having some lunch while I waited for the tents to come up, a large crowd assembled and stared at me as if I was some curious and strange wild animal. As I sat and watched the villagers, I called to mind a passage from Mr E. F. Knight's 'Where Three Empires Meet,' describing his first entrance into this strange country

by the more beaten track from Srinagar *viâ* Kargil: "We were at last in the land of the Pigtails. All the men in Shergol wore these appendages in the Chinese fashion, and had features of the pure Tibetan type, there being little if any admixture of Aryan blood here. I soon realised that I had reached a very strange land, a country of topsy-turvydom—where polyandry prevails instead of polygamy, where praying is all conducted by machinery, and where, in short, the traveller fresh from beyond the mountains is bewildered by the quaint sights, the strange beliefs, superstitions, and customs he comes across every day."

A chorten in Ladak.

One of the first buildings that caught my eye in the village was a *chorten*, one of the strange last resting-places of the ashes of the dead. Surmounting an archway was a square receptacle in which reposed, heaped up in a pile one on top of the other, a number of small squares of what appeared to be clay, each stamped with some figure or other. I subsequently discovered the history of these small images, which is in no way unworthy of the quaint people whose mortal remains they represent.

It appears that on the death of a Ládaki the rela-

tions are summoned to take part in the funeral, and remain in the house, partaking of the *chang*[1] and *sattoo*[2] provided, with every appearance of grief, as long as the corpse is there,—as much as fifteen or sixteen days if the individual has been lucky enough to die in the winter, at which season the climate admits of its being kept so long,—and assisting as far as they are required to, in the ceremony connected with the funeral.

When death has taken place an abbot is sent for from the nearest monastery, who prays over the corpse for half an hour or so, during which time he jerks and pulls at the pigtail of the deceased if it is a man, and the hair if it is a woman, and if on the completion of this ceremony blood has come from the nose, he pronounces it to be an extremely satisfactory sign, proving that the spirit has attained Nirvana. Should there be no blood, however, the ghost of the deceased is pronounced to be wandering through space in the position of a lost soul awaiting reimbodiment. In this case payments have to be made to the lamas for prayers for the lost spirit—an inducement, one would think, to deter the abbot from jerking over-violently at the pigtail. After this the corpse is tied up with ropes in a sitting position, placed in a bag, and removed from the room it has been occupying to the idol-room or chapel, which exists in almost every Ladaki's house, where it is placed in a corner and screened from view. All this is done by a class of people known as *phasspun*, whose special duty it is, and not by the abbot, who now enters the chapel with other lamas to pray and offer food and drink to the deceased, the former sitting

[1] A liquor corresponding to beer, made from barley, which constitutes the national drink of the Ladakis.

[2] Flour obtained from *grim*, the barley most grown in Ladak.

with his back to the corpse and the latter facing him. When the time for removing the corpse has come, it is carried to the door on the back of the nearest relative, who then deposits it in a coffin provided by the monastery conducting the funeral, which is then carried behind a procession of lamas and relations, praying and playing on musical instruments, to the burning-ground. Here it is burnt, the face being placed against the ground in a sort of oven, and when the first bone drops out the funeral ends. The lamas take the bone back to the idol-room, where they pound it up, mix it with clay, and put it into a mould, from which it emerges in the shape of a tiny figure. In the case of a rich man the image is built into a *chorten;* but the majority are placed in any old *chorten*. Such in brief is the history of the small clay figures which are found in the *chortens* of Ladak.[1]

I left Hannoo soon after 5 A.M. on the morning of the 5th, and soon reached the Indus. I then turned east, going up the right bank of the river, and after a halt in the middle of the day, went on to Shinbichian, in all twenty miles. Here I found a fine village, surrounded by almost perpendicular walls of rock in the form of an amphitheatre, and of great height. Unfortunately I was unable to take any photographs of the place, as it was too dark when I arrived, and I left early the following morning. I was lucky enough to get a pony, and was able to ride a good part of the way during the march of the 6th. The country was bleak and uninteresting, which induced me to push on with long marches, and after resting at Kulsi, where I got on to the Srinagar-Leh route, during the middle of the day, I marched on to Nurla in the evening, a

[1] For further details and much other excellent information concerning the Ladakis and their customs, see Ramsay's 'Western Tibet.'

distance in all of about twenty-three miles. I was a good deal astonished to find that much of my baggage was on this occasion carried by women; but they seemed to be quite used to this sort of work, and carried every bit as heavy loads as the men with the utmost indifference.

From Nurla I got ponies for the baggage, a great improvement on coolies, and leaving at 5 A.M. on the 7th, reached Saspul in time for a midday halt. Leaving Saspul at one o'clock, I went on to the village of Basgo, where I had another short rest and made some tea. While resting here I saw for the first time a lama, one of the priests of Lamaism, resplendent in scarlet robes. I also saw a monster prayer-wheel worked by water. This consisted of a large cylinder of wood, on which was written many hundred times the mystic sentence "Om mani padmi om!" usually interpreted as "Oh! the jewel in the lotos, oh!" The cylinder was caused to revolve by water, and each time it revolved once was equivalent to the owner of the wheel having repeated the mystic prayer the number of times it was written on the cylinder. As it was undoubtedly written many hundred times, and the cylinder revolved many thousand times during the course of the day, and as the chief object of a pious Ladaki appears to be to get as many prayers said in a lifetime as possible, the owner must have felt in a very satisfactory state as to the welfare of his soul. Just outside Basgo I came upon a fine specimen of the *mani* wall, which are to be found in quantities scattered among the mountains of Ladak. It consisted of a solid wall of stone, perhaps 10 or 12 feet thick and 6 or 8 feet in height, with a top layer, sloping like a cottage roof, of flat stones, on which were carved, often quite beautifully, the usual mystic sentence, and here

and there the figures of gods. At each end was a fine *chorten*. Whenever one comes to one of these *mani* walls one finds a well-worn path on both sides, the reason being that the Ladaki always walks past on the left-hand side, otherwise he would receive no benefit from passing them. As it is, by leaving them on his right-hand side he does his soul a lot of good! Many of these walls are in a dilapidated condition, the reason being, I believe, that to repair a wall only benefits the original builder, so that instead of rebuilding an old wall a rich man naturally sets to work to build a new one of his own.

I camped for a night at the village of Nimo, having marched about twenty-four miles during the day.

Leaving Nimo at 5 A.M., I marched on to Phiang, through country which was becoming of a more open description: table-lands and plateaux taking the place of the steep and narrow valleys to which I had become accustomed in Baltistan, the mountains assuming a more rounded appearance, and sand and gravel taking the place of rock and snow. Leaving Phiang, I soon got into the stony plain which stretches from the Indus to the foot of the mountain-range, where Leh is situated, and by twelve o'clock I reached the mountain capital, 11,500 feet above sea-level.

CHAPTER VI.

LEH TO HANLE.

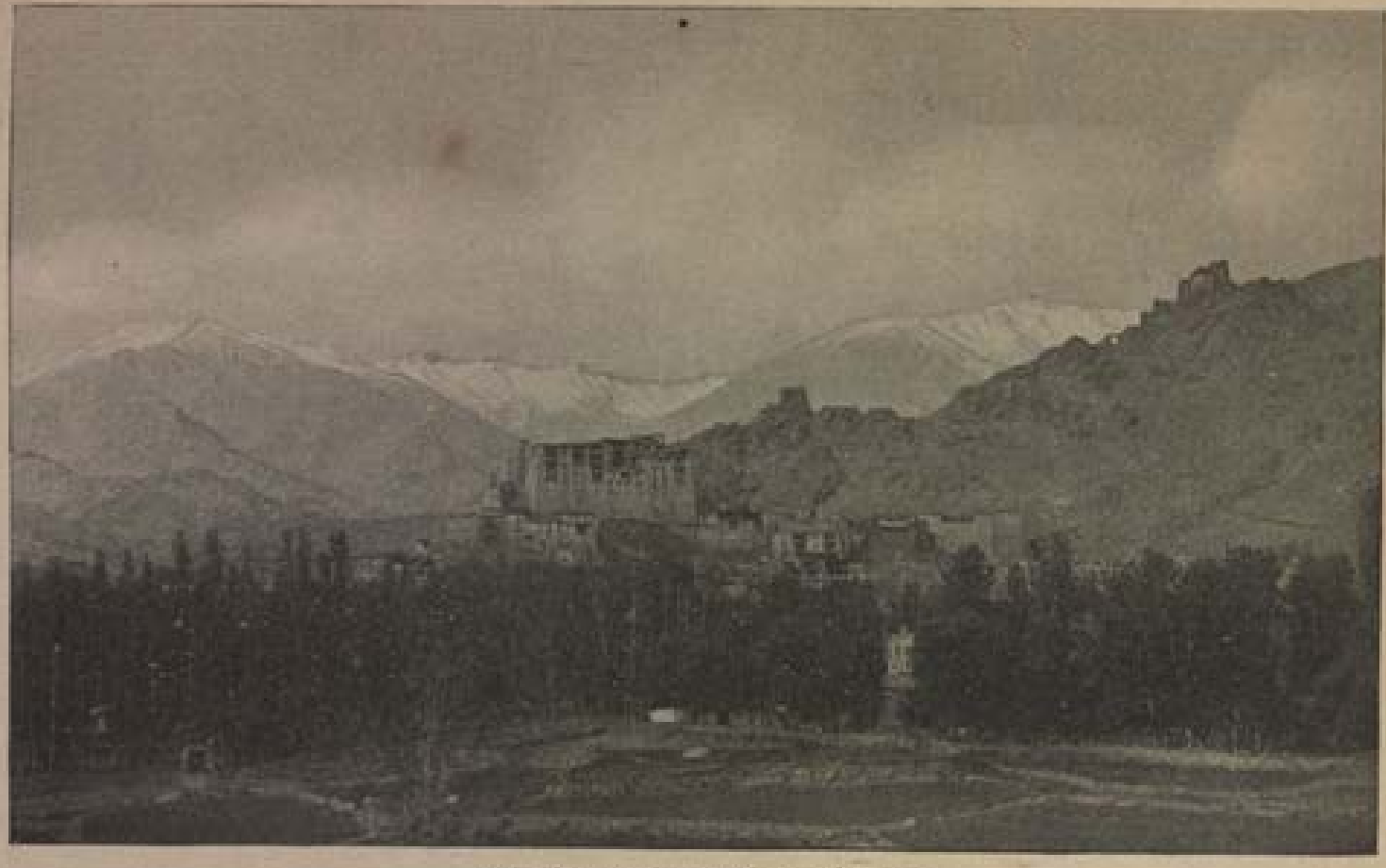
Work of the Moravian Mission—Leh—After *sharpoo*—*Sharpoo* wounded—The wounded *sharpoo* secured—Return to Leh—Preparations for leaving Leh—Departure from Leh—Hemis—The mystery-play—Hemis *gumpa*—Failing of a Ladaki pony—Yāks and goats engaged at Gya—Effects of rarefied atmosphere—Monotony of physical conformation of the country—*Nyáu* sighted—Champas—Long and unsuccessful pursuit of *nyáu*—The Tso Morari Lake—Death of a wild dog—Herds of *kyang*—Hanle—Quaint customs of my Ladaki guide—I part with Mohammed—On the merits of hillsmen as stalkers.

I FOUND the capital practically empty, for the merchants who gather here in the summer from all parts of Asia to barter and exchange their goods had not yet begun to arrive. Later on the quiet street would become a great central bazaar, where the inhabitants of India and Tibet, China, Yarkand, and Kashgar, would for the space of a few weeks meet and exchange their goods. The only Europeans I found were the members of the Moravian Mission, which has now been established in Leh for upwards of ten years, by whom I was hospitably entertained, and from whom I obtained much interesting information about the people and their life and customs. There is no doubt that they are much respected and liked by the people, and though the number of converts—about thirty—may seem small for the years of labour, they have done and

are doing a great deal for the people, especially in the way of relieving the sick, a benefit which they are not slow to take advantage of, as is clear from the fact that during the fourteen months, September '98 to December '99, no fewer than 1215 cases were treated in the small mission hospital, amounting to a total of 5908 visits. In addition to this, from 100 to 150 cases were treated by the mission doctor while on tour in the neighbourhood of Kulsi, where a new mission station has lately been opened.

The town of Leh itself is situated at the foot of the great mountain-ranges, the passes over which, such as the Kardong and Digger, form the highway to Turkestan and Central Asia. Surrounded by trees, which cover a good many acres of ground, and fields of grass and lucern, which are sown in quantities by the people to sell to the traders for their baggage animals, it forms a pleasant spot on which to rest the eye after the dreary monotony of the huge wastes all round, where, except when cultivated and irrigated by man, scarcely a tree or scrap of vegetation is to be seen. The chief street is quaint and picturesque, consisting of rows of shops behind an avenue of trees, closed in at one end by a large arch and gateway, while high up on a rock, frowning down on the north end, stands a large and unsightly building, the palace of the rajah. Beyond the main street there are one or two small and dirty side-alleys, and that is all. A short way from the bazaar stand the houses of the missionaries, the British joint-commissioner's house, and the bungalow for the use of travellers.

The date of my arrival was fortunate, for I heard that the great mystery-play, which is performed annually at the monastery of Hemis, two marches from Leh, was about to take place on the 18th, and as I



LEH, CAPITAL OF LADAK, 11,500 FEET.

was anxious to witness this curious religious pantomime I made my plans accordingly.

Local information described the mountains opposite Leh, on the left bank of the Indus, as a sure find for *sharpoo*; so on the 10th I sent camp on in the morning and rode over myself in the afternoon, having made arrangements with a Ladaki shikarie to meet me at the foot of the mountains. On the 11th I was up at 4 A.M. and off to look for game, with Mohammed and Saltana. We went over a lot of ground of the most disagreeable description to walk over, but saw nothing till 3 P.M., when we made out two fine males, which we proceeded to try and stalk. The stalk, however, proved a failure, and we got back to camp at 5 P.M. after a hard and unsatisfactory day.

The next morning we were off again soon after 4 A.M.—Mohammed, Saltana, the Ladaki (whose name I never could manage), and myself—and by 7 A.M. had sighted some sheep. After crawling very flat for a considerable distance over some very hard and stony ground, we got within shooting distance unobserved. The position, however, was not a satisfactory one from a shooting point of view, for it was just eight o'clock, and as I was facing due east, and the sun had just risen over the brow of the hill facing me, it was bang in my eyes, and the sights had that peculiar blurred appearance which is so very annoying when one is endeavouring to draw a bead. Still, as the *sharpoo* is a restless beast and always on the alert, I made the best of it and fired. When the smoke cleared away I saw the animal making off at top speed, and concluded that I had missed. Taking the magazine rifle, I ran on and gave him a shot with the 200-yards sight up. He went on out of sight; but Mohammed said that he was hit, so we decided to send the Ladaki

to follow him and see if he would lie down. On examining the place where he had been when I first fired, I was surprised and pleased to find blood, as I had thought that I had missed clean with the first shot. After seeing the Ladaki started I took Mohammed and Saltana, and went on in search of further sport, but without success; and we worked our way back to camp, which we reached soon after midday. In the afternoon a peculiarly unpleasant wind sprang up, which continued to blow with great violence for some hours, a performance which was repeated every afternoon during the whole of my stay here, making life in a tent very disagreeable. We also came in for one or two very heavy hail-storms accompanied by thunder.

Head of sharpoo.

For the next three days I was up regularly at four in the morning, and climbing after *sharpoo* all day; but was singularly unlucky, and never once succeeded in getting a fair shot at one. On the evening of the 13th the Ladaki got back to camp, and, what was more, he brought the head of my *sharpoo* of the 12th with him, which had a fine thick horn 26½ inches in length. He said he had tracked it a long way and finally found it dead.

On the 14th Mohammed was ill, or said he was, and

I took Saltana and the Ladaki with me, though, as already mentioned, without success. On the 15th I sent camp back to Leh with Mohammed, and got back myself soon after midday after an unsuccessful morning after *sharpoo*. Still the result of the week was one good head, so I had not much to complain of.

The 16th was a very busy day, and I had no end of things to do, for on the morrow I was about to start on an expedition into wild and inhospitable tracts of country in search of the great Tibetan sheep or *nyán* (*Ovis Hodgsoni*) and other game: vast stretches of stony hills and table-lands, in many parts entirely uninhabited, where the most I could hope to obtain, beyond what game I might shoot myself, would be an occasional sheep from the nomad pastoral folk. Jovara, whom I had sent from the Basha with my skins and horns to Srinagar, had arrived, bringing with him my *yūk-dans* and stores which had been left there, and I now decided to dismiss him and Abaloo, and to engage two Ladakis as post-runners in their stead; for the country I was about to visit was quite unknown to them, and they would consequently be useless. I procured about ten maunds (800 lb.) of flour for my servants, in addition to which there was all my own food to be thought of, and I also gave them warm clothes and extra blankets, and Ram Pershad a *pushteen*, as I expected to meet with considerable cold at the great heights I was likely to reach. Just before I left an Indian merchant with some European stores arrived, and I found it very useful, being able to replenish my own.

At last the moment for departure came, and at 8 A.M. we marched down the main street and out into the plain beyond. I jogged on for the first ten miles, halting at a village with a pleasant shady orchard till

my baggage caught me up, and then went on the remaining twelve miles to the monastery of Hemis. Making my way up a narrow and twisting defile in the mountains to the south, I came upon the monastery, which, hidden away among the mountains, and surrounded on all sides by absolute precipices, shut off from the outside world, the home of a hundred lamas, should be a holy place indeed! When I arrived,

Hemis gompa.

however, the quiet which I imagine usually rests upon this secluded spot was conspicuous by its absence; for people from all parts of Ladak were collected there, bivouacking on every square yard of ground that was not an actual precipice, all talking, laughing, and shouting; and what with the braying of their asses, which was incessant, and the harsh discordant sounds of drums and horns, and all kinds of music from the

precincts of the monastery, one might have been standing at the very foot of the tower of Babel itself.

The morning of the 18th broke clear and absolutely cloudless; high overhead a sky of deepest blue; all round forming a natural theatre, walls of naked rock stood out in bold relief, their jagged outline showing sharp and clear against the heavens; below, the courtyard of the monastery, the stage of the fantastic scenes of the mystery-play, its roof the heavens, its floor the earth. Seated in a gallery commanding the whole courtyard, one white man among the thousands of another race, I watched the scenes of this strange drama, a curious mixture of religion and buffoonery, as they succeeded one another to the sounds of all kinds of music, until I half expected to see an image such as Nebuchadnezzar the king set up, and hear a herald cry aloud, "At what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up."

All day long the scenes of this idolatrous pageant were enacted by the priests of Lamaism, while the burning summer sun beat down, and the thousands watched in silent awe. It is unnecessary for me to give a detailed description of this heathenish display, since this has already been done so admirably by Mr Knight in the pages of 'Where Three Empires Meet,'[1] and I need merely say that a general impression of the whole was a collection of devil dances of the most weird and fantastic description, the actors in which were arrayed in the most elaborate and often beautiful robes of embroidered Chinese silk, and disguised by masks of the most gruesome and horrible

[1] A full account of this, with as much else as is known of the religion of Tibet, will also be found in Waddel's 'Lamaism.'

expressions, one of the objects of the play being to give the simple onlookers an idea of the fiends of darkness who will pursue them on their departure from this life, and endeavour to frighten them off the narrow road, so that they may be accustomed to the sight of them and consequently not be so terrified as they

Actors in the mystery-play at Hemis.

otherwise would be. Their appearance was indeed sufficiently awe-inspiring, and if their chief object was to represent a ghoulish band of demons—

> "Such as it would seem
> To freak of nature owed abortive birth;
> And creatures misbegotten of the stream,
> In hideous shapes, fantastic as a dream,
> When in a trance the sleeper's fears prevail,
> And shadowy horror quenches reason's gleam"[1]—

they were certainly successful in the main.

Other scenes showed how by the influence of holy men these fiends might be routed and discomfited. At

[1] Whyte-Melville, The Ark.

the beginning and end of every scene the actors made their entrances and exits through a large doorway leading into the interior of the monastery, on either side of which stood two lamas gorgeously arrayed in scarlet, who heralded them in and out on trumpets made of human thigh-bones! The band, too, which played during the greater part of the performance, produced music accompanied by a curious and monotonous chanting by deep voices, of a kind well calculated to add to the weirdness and unreality of the whole performance. Conspicuous among the instruments which composed it — mostly cymbals and a peculiar flat-shaped drum—were two enormous instruments in the form of horns, each about 6 feet long, which gave out a peculiar deep note.

The next morning the head lama conducted me over the monastery or *gompa*, which is a large ramshackle old building, about three hundred years old, full of shrines and altars to many gods, the particular god of the monastery itself being a peculiarly ugly and revolting specimen. His altar was covered with offerings of fruit, flowers, and cake, and much incense of a sickly and intoxicating nature was burning in front of him. From this idol I passed on to many others, and noticed here and there peculiar lamps burning with a small dull flame, which made the gloom of the interior the more conspicuous. These, I was informed, are never allowed to go out, and burn for a whole year without requiring to be replenished. I was also shown the holy books of Lamaism, written in a language understood only by the lamas.

Having seen all there was to be seen, I made my way back to my place in the gallery, and the play began again. It lasted but an hour or two, when the lamas retired to the innermost recesses of the *gompa*

to perform certain religious rights, presumably of too sacred a description to be witnessed by the common people, and after four hours of this the play was resumed once more. The sacrifice of some dogs and a pony formed the beginning of the last act of this strange drama, to take away the sins of the people. There was the pony in the courtyard, and I feared for a moment that it was going to be butchered before my eyes. The sacrifice, however, turned out to be quite a mild affair, the pony simply being stripped of saddle and bridle and daubed all over with red paint. It was then dragged round the place two or three times, after which it was driven loose into the country, there to lead life as it chose, never more to be made use of by man.

The play was drawing to a close when I left at 4 P.M. I had sent camp on ten miles, and had ordered a pony to wait for me outside the monastery; but to my disgust I found the pony such a wretched thin beast that the saddle would not stay on, and after two or three attempts I gave it up and had to walk the ten miles to camp.

On the 20th I struck into the mountains to the south of the Indus, and after a march of fifteen or sixteen miles reached the village of Gya, the last sign of human habitation I was to see for some days. Here I discharged my ponies and got yāks for the baggage, and also a herd of eight or ten goats to supply me with milk. I also engaged a Ladaki who knew the country, and was acquainted with the most likely haunts of game, to accompany me.

On the 21st I left behind me this last place of permanent human habitation and marched over the wild and barren mountain-land towards the east, camping for the night at the foot of the Kameri Pass, where

I must have been at an altitude of over 14,000 feet, as I had been going up-hill since leaving Gya, which stands at 13,500 feet. The scene was wild and desolate: no tree to relieve the monotony of the view; but here and there a curious weed grew, showing little above the surface of the ground, but having a fair root, which we used for fuel.

The next day I crossed the pass, going on ahead of my camp to look for game; but nothing was to be seen,

Yák carrying baggage.

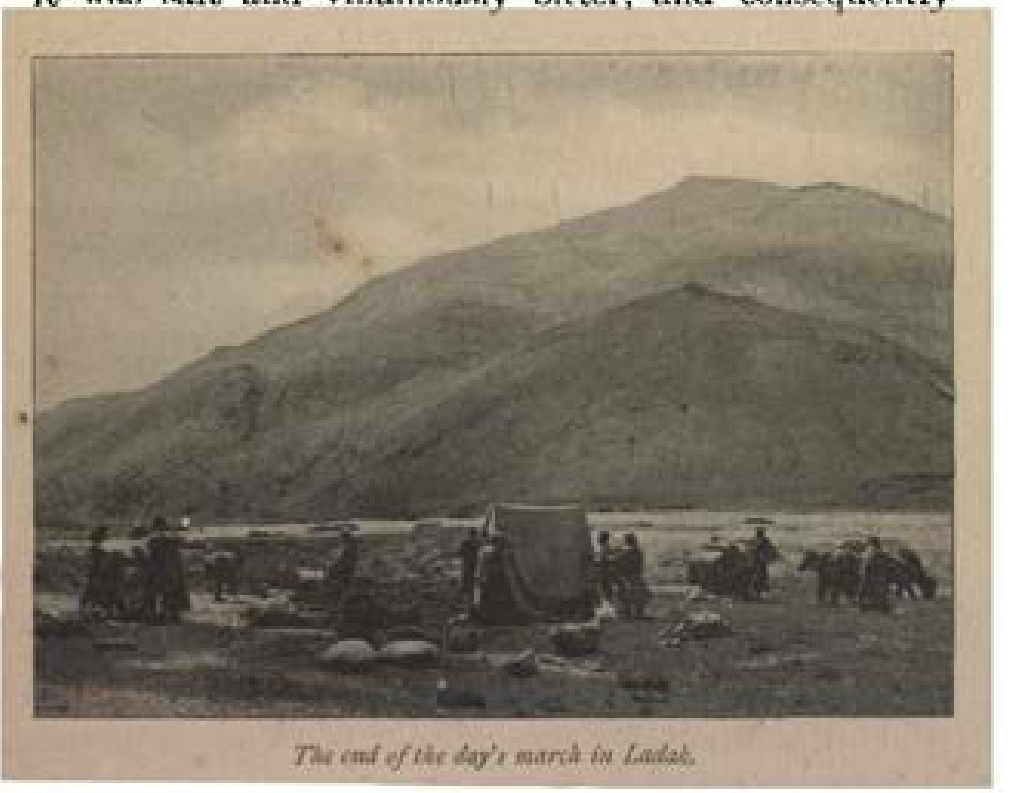
and we camped in a hollow some way over the summit. The air was very rarefied, and as we ascended the mountain in the morning all seemed to feel its depressing effects. Dead silence fell on us as we toiled slowly upwards, broken only by the laboured breathing of the party as we stopped every few yards to get our breath. At the top of the pass we halted to rest, and as I lay on the hard dry ground an irresistible drowsiness stole over me, and I was soon in a heavy sleep.

This is the effect the rarefied air had on me, and I did not wake till roughly shaken by Mohammed, when we went on and camped in the hollow mentioned.

The whole country seemed to consist of the tops as it were of huge mountains, resembling monster molehills; high sandy and gravelly table-lands intersected by valleys 15,000 and 16,000 feet above sea-level, with here and there a snow-clad peak. Odd seams of colour appeared in places on the mountain-sides, crimson, purple, yellow, and black standing out boldly against the everlasting background of dreary dust colour. All day long on the 23rd I wound about among the rounded mountain-tops in search of game. Camp followed me to the head of a large sandy plain where I halted for the night, and where I also saw for the first time the *kyang* or wild horse, and some female *goa* (Tibetan gazelle), and *nyán*, the great wild sheep of Tibet. So the days passed, varying little one from another, and the following extract from my diary may be taken as a description of a typical day at this period of my expedition :—

"Struck camp at 8 A.M., marching eastward all day. In front sand, behind sand, and on each side sand. Overhead a brazen sky from which blazed down the sun with pitiless fury, the thin dry air affording no protection from its rays. I gazed round in vain in search of something on which to rest my weary eye. Far as the eye could see in every direction lay masses of dry burned-up sand, broken here and there by huge mountains of shale and gravel, resembling nothing so much as monster ash-heaps. Behind me panted and groaned the yāks with the baggage, under stress of the heat and drought,—for rain is here unknown or nearly so, and all the snow that is going to melt having done so, water is scarce and only to be found in places,—har-

monising with the general monotony of their surroundings by never exceeding the monotonous pace of two miles an hour. At length a bright speck caught my eye, glittering in the dull setting of the chaos all round. As we approached, the speck grew larger, till it resolved itself into a large lake. How clear and cool it looked! how tempting for a long drink! But, alas! it was salt and villainously bitter, and consequently



The end of the day's march in Ladak.

quite undrinkable. Truly the waters of Mara—a salt lake at 15,000 feet above sea-level.

"On we tramped, the poor, parched, sun-baked earth reflecting the rays of the sun till I felt as if I was walking through a furnace. At last towards evening we came upon a tiny trickle of water running from a snow-capped peak above. We threw ourselves down and awaited the arrival of the yāks. They soon turned up, though one had stopped a mile back and refused

to go farther, and we quickly had the tents up. Then began a hunting for dung for fuel to cook our evening meal over—the only fuel to be had in this waste corner of the earth. The half-cooked and somewhat unsavoury meal finished, I was soon in the land of shadows, renewing strength and vigour for the toil and labour of another day."

At last the day came when I saw a small herd of rams of the great wild sheep I was in search of. I had sent camp over a pass called the Polakonka, between 16,000 and 17,000 feet in height, while I had climbed some mountains to the south-east, and had reached a very high altitude, as from where I was I looked down on the summit of the pass far below. On reaching a nullah in the mountain-side we came upon the rams—five in all—feeding on the banks of the stream which ran down the nullah, and after having watched them and seen that they were likely to remain where they were for the time being, proceeded to stalk them. Most unfortunately, when we were within a few hundred yards of them, a sudden and unexpected snowstorm came on, during which the wind blew from every direction, and when next we saw them, on the blizzard clearing off, they had crossed the nullah and were going hard up the opposite side, having evidently got our wind. I was much disgusted; but there was no help for it, and we made our way down the mountain-side to camp, which was pitched at the foot of the nullah, a short way over the pass. I found here a small encampment of Champas, the nomad pastoral folk who wander with their flocks over the barren stretches of Ladak seeking the meagre pasturage afforded by the high upland valleys,—the first human beings I had come across since leaving Gya.

The next morning I started in the direction taken

by the sheep the day before, leaving camp where it was. A long climb brought us to snow, and about two o'clock we sighted the rams. They were a long way off; but I settled to go after them, evidently much to the disgust of Mohammed, who seemed to be getting rather tired of continual hard work. By five o'clock we found ourselves within about a quarter of a mile of them; but as we were making the final approach, owing to carelessness on the part of Mohammed, they discovered us, and I was only able to get a snap-shot at their tails as they galloped away. We now had to think about getting back to camp, which was a long way off, for we were on the far side of a nullah known as the Rhang, and between us and rest loomed the Polakonka Pass. Night came on apace, making the tramp back seem even longer than it really was, and by the time I reached camp at nine o'clock I was pretty well exhausted, for prolonged exertion in the rarefied atmosphere at these heights is very fatiguing: indeed I was so overcome with drowsiness that I could only just keep awake long enough to drink a bowl of soup, after which I pulled off my clothes, and was asleep almost before my head touched the pillow.

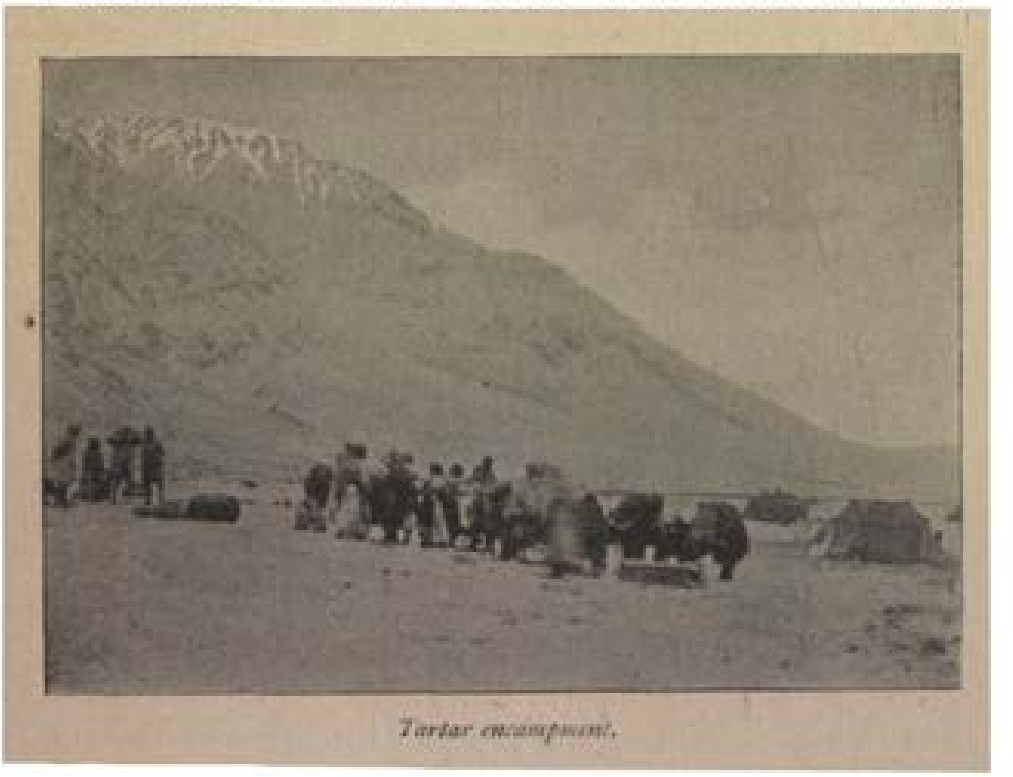
The next day I struck camp, recrossed the Polakonka Pass, and pitched camp half-way up the Rhang nullah, where I had last seen the *nyáñ*. The following morning I started at 7 A.M., following the tracks of the sheep, camp keeping at a respectful distance behind. Reaching the head of the Rhang nullah, I crossed the range into another valley on the far side, called by the Ladaki, Naroochen, where I sighted some *goa*, which however turned out to be females. About midday we spied some animals a long way off across the valley, which looked like our friends the rams, so leaving camp to be pitched where it was, as we were

close to water, we followed them. They were moving on, but we soon came upon their tracks, which proved them to be *nyáñ*. These we followed,—for the animals had moved out of sight,—and before long found ourselves on a great table-land of gravel, where tracking became very difficult. Here on this great plain, 17,000 feet up, we wandered trying to pick up the tracks, till suddenly at about four o'clock, coming to a steep nullah at the edge of the table-land, we stumbled on some female *nyáñ* within 40 yards of us. Before we could decide what to do they became aware of our presence, and I was just in time, as I ran to the edge of the nullah, to see the five big rams galloping along the bottom as hard as they could go, after which there was nothing left for us to do but return to camp in the Naroochen valley.

The next day I started at 7 A.M., still in pursuit, with camp following as usual. I climbed many hills, and went up and down many valleys, and at length sighted the rams once more. They were travelling slowly on, so we had to follow them as best we could. At three o'clock they seemed to settle on a hillside, and we tried a stalk once more. A long detour was necessary in order to keep out of their sight, and it was not until 5 P.M. that we found ourselves near the place where they had last been seen. I gave Mohammed a final warning to be careful, but all to no purpose. He went blundering on till he went slap into the sight of an old ram who was lying down. None of the rest of the herd were in sight, and though we could only see the head of the animal lying down, it was very soon apparent that he could see us, for he was up and away like a flash, taking of course the whole of the rest of the herd with him. A veil shall be drawn over the

scene of random shots at hopeless ranges which ensued, quickly followed, when the magazine was emptied, by a volley of abuse hurled at the head of the careless Kashmiri, which might have been prolonged had it not been for want of breath, and remembrance that camp was a long way off, necessitating a weary tramp of at least two hours before food and rest could be hoped for.

Sick at continued bad luck, and tired of pursuing a herd which seemed to bear a charmed existence,



Tartar encampment.

I left them after this and shaped my course towards the Hanle river. A day and a half brought me to the head of a large lake called the Tso Morari, where I found a large encampment of Tartars from whom I procured fresh yāks for the baggage. They are a curious people these nomad shepherds, living in settlements in black bell-shaped tents made of goats'

hair, and tending their flocks and herds of sheep and goats. As long as they are camped at a great height they appear to be quite happy and content; but seem to dislike living below an altitude of about 16,000 feet, though they are driven down in the winter to the more sheltered valleys at 14,000 feet and 15,000 feet. I always noticed a number of Tibetan dogs in all the Tartar encampments I came across, which invariably barked furiously on our arrival, and seemed to be excellent watch-dogs, and are also, I believe, first-rate sheep-dogs.

For the next day and a half my way lay along the banks of the Tso Morari Lake,—which, by the way, is salt and undrinkable,—and then on again over interminable tracts of dreary desolation with which the traveller in Tibet so soon becomes familiar. Here and there in the vicinity of water grass was to be seen, and also on many of the mountains herbs of sorts which are presumably sufficient to support life, though they grow so scantily that at a short distance the hill-side has the appearance of being absolutely barren. Thus I marched daily, with little worthy of notice occurring, if I except the killing on one occasion of a wild dog. The Champas with me called it *shonko*. It was of a golden colour, about the size of a collie, and with the head of a wolf.

On July the 5th I entered the Hanle plain. A large stretch of level, surrounded by bleak mountains: a sluggish stream flowing between banks covered with coarse grass,—such was Hanle. Galloping about in every direction were great herds of the *kyang* or wild horse; and as I crossed the plain I must have seen hundreds of these ugly fiddle-headed creatures. On this particular occasion I had no objection to their frisking about as much as they chose, there being no

other game in the immediate neighbourhood; but I have since had frequent occasion for heaping imprecations on their heads, and have as often called to mind the very excellent description of the animal given by Colonel Reginald Heber Percy, which is far too good not to be quoted:—

"The *kyang* was doubtless originally intended by Providence to fulfil some good purpose, but having turned out a failure was located in Tibet, where it was probably considered it would not be much in the way; or else it was designed to take the place of the insect life on the lower ranges, and act as a blister on the temper of the sportsman. The *sharpoo*, limb of the devil as it is, has some good points in its favour—*e.g.*, a graceful carriage, fine horns, and it is a desirable acquisition to the bag. The *kyang* has nothing to recommend or excuse it. It is an ugly, donkeyfied, fiddle-headed brute, with straight shoulders. In colour it is a mealy bay, with a dark brown hog mane, dorsal stripe, and tail. Its head and ears are coarse and large, and its screeching bray is as unpleasant as its general appearance. Being absolutely worthless to shoot, it is always trading upon that fact; and on the utterly false pretence that it is deeply interested in the actions and habits of human beings, particularly Europeans, is for ever thrusting itself into society where it is not welcome, thereby spoiling the sportsman's chance of a quiet interview with the animal of his choice. The one trait in its character that might be reckoned as a palliation by an unduly benevolent commentator, is that it appears not to be selfish. As soon as it thinks that it has got a sportsman's temper well under way, it will scour the country round for all its friends and relations, and assemble them to enjoy

together the interesting spectacle of an angry man armed with a rifle, which he dare not discharge, for fear of alarming something worth firing at. Hints and persuasion are thrown away, and nothing but a declaration of war has the smallest effect on *kyang*. A skilful diplomat may occasionally gain a temporary advantage, by misleading *kyang* as to his intended route—getting the *kyang*, for instance, to believe that he wants to cross a particular pass, and then, by taking advantage of cover, escaping up a side ravine; but as a rule the sportsman has only the choice of two alternatives: either to take the first opportunity of hiding and remaining hidden till the disturbance is over, or else going to some other part of the ground."

At the end of the plain, where the river flows out into a valley, on either side of which rise tiers of sandy hills, becoming more rocky as they get higher, stands a monastery, in the vicinity of which are to be seen a few small huts scattered about the edge of the plain, the abode of a few shepherds and goat-herds. We pitched the tents near the monastery, and the Ladaki whom I had brought from Gya, who according to his own showing was a man of priestly rank, took the opportunity of begging a few rupees in order to buy a sheep to offer as a sacrifice at the *gompa*, assuring me that good sport and a large bag of fine heads would then be ensured. I had my own idea as to the probable destination of the sheep, for Ladakis, in common with many other people, are fond of meat with their bread when they can get it; but I gave him the desired sum and sent him off to perform his sacrifice. He was an amusing fellow in many ways, more especially when he had no intention of being so, as when he went through certain religious observances, which he did

on every possible occasion. Frequently we used to come across piles of stones or horns at the summit of passes or in any equally convenient place, and whenever we chanced on one of these, he would stop, walk three times round the erection, falling flat on his face at the completion of each circumambulation, and generally wind up by tearing off a portion of his garment and attaching it to the cairn. My Kashmiris used to look on with scornful toleration at what they considered the follies of the infidel; but then the Kashmiri always was a supercilious sort of beggar, wrapped up in the cloak of his own superiority, and quite unable to realise what a far better fellow is the simple, honest Ladaki than his hypocritical rascally self. I do not wish to unduly run down the Kashmiri, and for the most part those with me served me well; but it is an unfortunate infliction to be unable to tell the truth, and hypocritical obsequiousness is apt to get on one's nerves.

From the lamas I found I was able to hire fresh yāks for the baggage and a pony for myself. I also heard of a young Champa shepherd, camped about ten miles off, who was said to know the country round Hanle well and to be thoroughly cognisant with the most likely haunts of game, so sent a man off to find and bring him. This suited me very well, as I was tired of Mohammed, who was always trying to shirk his work, and had determined to be rid of him, more especially as he had been overheard telling the other Kashmiris that he had gone about as far as he meant to, and was going to do his best to stop me going any farther. Accordingly the next morning I sent Saltana and the Ladaki off to look for game, telling them that I would follow, and then had Mohammed up. Having told him what I thought of him, I informed him that I no longer

required his services, and that he was consequently at liberty to go as soon as he liked. He tried to persuade Subhana to return with him to Kashmir; but he refused to be persuaded, and decided to remain with me, though I told him he might go if he was anxious to return to his home. After this I went out and joined Saltana, and after a tiring day, without a sight of game of any sort, returned to find Mohammed gone. I have no reason to suppose that he was worse than most Kashmiris who have the reputation of being excellent shikaries; but he was an old man, and I fancy felt the strain of a long and hard trip more than he was willing to admit.

Many authorities on shooting put Kashmiris at the top of the tree as stalkers; but whether under the term Kashmiri they include the tribes that live in the mountainous regions beyond the valley of Kashmir or not, I cannot say. As far as my own experience goes, I have no hesitation in saying that of a number of men who accompanied me in the capacity of shikarie, during the year I was shooting in the Himalayas, two stood out from the rest as far and away the finest stalkers I have ever seen: one the Champa shepherd whom I had sent for, and who joined me a few days later, and the other a "Boota" or native of the district between Chilas and Hunza; and from my own experience, and from what I have gathered from others who know the country, I should say these latter would be very hard to beat both in their extraordinary capacity for getting over the most impossible-looking places on some of the severest and most precipitous country probably, in which it is possible to pursue game, in the world, and in their natural genius for defeating by skilful stalking the object of their pursuit.

CHAPTER VII.

SPORT IN THE HANLE DISTRICT.

High altitudes — Gesso — A flat crawl — *Nyân* hit and secured — After Tibetan gazelle—Aggravating habits of same—An exciting crawl, and death of a *goa*—Another crawl and a stern chase—Death of another *goa*—Burhel sighted—And shot—Another burhel shot—Third burhel shot—Return to Hanle—Fishing in the Hanle river—Gesso's parent—Cussedness of the wind—A long chase ending in failure — On the fascination of the desert — Difficulty of judging distance—The Koyul valley—Gesso returns to his father—Crossing the Indus—Trekking north—Shooshal.

FOR some reason or other I suffered from a sharp attack of what I suppose was the ailment known as mountain sickness, to which every one is liable at great altitudes, which took the shape of sharp pains in the back of the head; but as I found that when remaining quiet and doing nothing it only made itself more felt, I struck camp and left the Hanle *gompa*, marching east over rising ground all day. Nothing but a few female gazelle was to be seen all day, and in the evening we pitched camp at a tiny spring at a height of between 17,000 and 18,000 feet, the only water within a radius of some miles. It was a very tiny spring indeed, the supply of water being so microscopic that it had to be dished up with a spoon! and the amount that we could afford to waste on ablutions was infinitesimal indeed.

Late in the evening the young shepherd whom I had sent for, "Gesso" by name, arrived, and I paid off the Ladaki from Gya and allowed him to return to his home.

Early on the morning of the 8th I left camp with Gesso and Saltana to scour the arid uplands, which stretched away in every direction as far as one could see, in search of *nyán*, and by great good luck came upon a herd of ten rams within a couple of hours of starting. They were moving restlessly about, heading first in one direction and then starting back and turning off in another, which kept us where we were, watching them till they at length one by one began to lie down and appeared to be settled. We then proceeded to stalk them—no easy matter, for they were lying on a very flat bit of ground, and the wind, as is so often the case in Ladak, would not blow from any one quarter for more than five minutes at a time. However, after a great deal of crawling and worming our way flat along the ground—a most unpleasant process, during which an astonishing quantity of gravel and sharp stones succeeded in working itself through one's clothes and keeping one painfully alive to its presence—we were so far successful as to approach within about 100 yards of the nearest beast; and working the rifle into position, I then waited where I was for one of them to get up; for as they lay, nothing but the top of their backs was visible.

The quiet steady shot for which I was waiting and hoping, however, was not to be; for all of a sudden, with horrid perverseness, the wind, which must have been blowing straight in our faces for nearly ten minutes, shifted right round and blew in a violent gust from straight behind us. Up got the rams in a body and went off without waiting a second. I

fired the 400 without effect, so taking the magazine, fired at the nearest beast with the 200-yards sight up, and seeing him fall back, promptly drew on another. He too appeared to be hit, but went on with the rest, and I had to turn my attention to number one. A glimpse at him through the glass showed that he had a broken foreleg, a matter which he seemed to make light of, for he went along at a surprising pace, and a stern chase ensued. Several times I nearly got up to him; but on each occasion he managed to put on a spurt and get out of shot. At length he took us into rather more broken ground, and getting up unnoticed, I finished him with a bullet through the heart at midday. Though nothing very big for one of these sheep, I was glad enough to have secured his horns, and shall not soon forget the stern chase which I had to get them. The other one I had hit I was lucky enough to get too, though not for some days, as a shepherd who was driving a flock of sheep across this part of the country to pasture on the Hanle plain came upon his dead body two days later, and I got the head from him when close to the same spot at a later date. Like the majority of

Head of nyân.

old rams, he had the tips of his horns broken off from fighting; but had a fine massive horn, nevertheless, measuring 37½ inches in length and 17½ inches in circumference.

I took a day off in camp on Sunday and superintended the cleaning of the horns and curing of the head skin during the morning, and filled up the afternoon writing letters. While thus engaged four male gazelle made their appearance on the horizon and came cantering along towards the spring. It was not long, however, before the appearance of a tent in the place where they had doubtless expected to find only the usual spring attracted their attention, and pulling up short they scurried off in the opposite direction. I got my rifle and went after them for a bit, but they kept to the plain where I could not get near them, and a shot at long range did them no damage.

There is something peculiarly aggravating about the Tibetan gazelle, or *goa* as it is locally known; for though quick enough at getting away when disturbed, he seldom troubles to go farther than to get comfortably out of range, when he pulls up and looks round in a bored sort of way, as if in protest at your putting him to the trouble of having to get out of the way at all. As he almost invariably sticks to the plain or very flat hillsides, he can remain and watch one's vain endeavours to obscure oneself by grovelling along flat on the ground with impunity; and I do not think that there are many things more exasperating than to witness, after the torture and exertion of a prolonged crawl in unpleasantly close contact with mother earth, during which sand, gravel, and stone permeates the whole of one's being, the offensive twitch of his short little tail as he canters leisurely off to a distant corner of the ground. The

only consolation one has when setting about stalking the *goa* is derived from the fact that one has not to trouble about the wind, though whether it is owing to his inability to detect the presence of man by means of smell, or whether it is that he does not connect it with danger, I cannot say. I am perfectly well aware that eminent authorities laugh at the idea of this animal and the Tibetan antelope, which latter, according to Colonel Ward, the Tartars say is noted for the same peculiarity, paying no attention to persons passing to windward of them, as instance the statement of the latter writer in his 'Tourists' and Sportsmen's Guide to Kashmir and Ladak': "The Tartars declare that this antelope can be approached down wind as easily as against it. Believe it if you like, but do not try it often or you will find yourself turning your back on Chang Chenmo with one or two pairs of horns only." I did not find that this opinion was held by the Tartars I had with me when after the antelope; but they certainly held it with regard to the gazelle, and when in pursuit of this latter animal I never took much notice of the wind, and remember on one occasion approaching quite close to some females, who took not the slightest notice though the wind was behind me. Perhaps, however, having no horns, they knew the value of the absence of these adornments, and traded upon their knowledge.

For the next few days I was up with the sun regularly, and walking and riding alternately over the endless stretches of sandy hill and plain, scouring the country in search of game, occasionally coming across small herds of gazelle, and frequently numbers of the useless, inquisitive *kyang*, who would thrust their unwelcome presence where it was in noway desired, standing staring at us till we approached within 100 yards

or less, when with a snort and a toss of the head they would turn and trot off, only to turn and gaze again till we once more approached quite close.

At last on the 12th I came across a single male gazelle. I was walking along the Ladak side of the hills which mark the boundary between Ladak and the regions under the rule of Lhasa, when the telescopic arrangement with which Gesso appeared to have been fitted in the place of the more ordinary eyes of most mortals, discovered the small animal feeding on the scant herbage which here and there was dotted about on the undulating plain. I failed to see anything even with the glass myself, and told him we must go nearer. There was no great difficulty in getting to within a few hundred yards of the animal, but from here onwards the ground was so flat that it seemed very difficult to know how to proceed. To add to the difficulty of the thing a more than usually inquisitive *kyang* must needs come up from a distant part of the plain to inquire into our movements, and became so interested in them that it was all I could do to restrain myself from putting a bullet through his heart. I did, however, keeping myself in hand by promising myself the satisfaction of assisting him out of this world should my stalk after the gazelle miscarry. Having assured myself that there was no cover of any sort, I made my men lie down where they were, and then started wriggling along myself, as flat on the ground as I could. In the meanwhile the *goa*, tired no doubt of searching for grass where there can have been little more than a single blade to every few yards of sand and gravel, had subsided, and was lying with his head away from me, so that when I was flat on the ground I could only just see the tips of his horns. Progress was slow, as I could

only manage to worm my way along about a yard at a time, when I stayed to see that the animal was still unsuspicious. By the time I had got to within 80 yards or so, he was tired of lying down, and got up and began looking about him. I got the rifle, which I had been pushing in front of me, to my shoulder, and as soon as ever I could draw a bead on him from my awkward position, fired. When the smoke cleared away I was a good deal pleased to see four legs in the air, and was soon examining the dead beast, who had a nice head with a pair of horns 12 inches in length.

As I was making my way towards the spot on the Hanle river to which I had sent camp, I made out two more *goa* moving slowly along over the plain we had just traversed. They settled ere long on about as flat a bit of ground as was to be found in the neighbourhood, and there was nothing for it but to pursue the same tactics which had been successful against the first. Leaving my men where they were, I began the painful process of wriggling serpent-wise over the stony surface. On this occasion, however, I was not so lucky, as I was still about 150 yards off when the animals got up and began moving away. I fired at the nearer of the two, and though he went off I saw that he was hit. It was just 10.30, and many a mile over hill and plain did that three-legged *goa* take me before I finally got on terms with him at three in the afternoon. At one period during the chase I was watching him making up a hillside through the glass, about half a mile off, when an eagle suddenly swooped down on him and attacked him! He still struggled on, however, and gazelle and eagle went out of sight together. When I did at last secure him at three o'clock I was pretty well exhausted; but it had been a most exciting chase, and thoroughly

enjoyable. The two heads made a pretty pair, and I trudged back to camp, which I reached at 5 P.M., very well satisfied with myself.

The next day I marched down the Hanle river to the foot of some hills where I hoped to find burhel (*Ovis nahura*), the blue sheep of Tibet. On the 14th I was up at 5 A.M. and climbing the mountains above camp. The sun soon became oppressively hot, as indeed it is all through the short summer in this dry, burned-up land, and the ascent of the steep mountain—for burhel always live at a great height, and are, I believe, never found at an altitude of less than 10,000 feet, while here they seemed to prefer 16,000 and 17,000 feet—was very arduous. On reaching a high ravine we were rewarded by the sight of a flock of burhel lying down on the opposite side. It was a long time before I could make them out, for their grey-blue coats matched the background of slate-coloured rock so exactly that one might gaze hard at them, as long as they were still, without realising that one was not staring at a bit of rock. At last one of them moving caught my eye, and I then made out the rest. They were in an excellent place for a stalk, and we immediately started after them. I think I must have got within 60 yards of them, and, taking matters easily, I fired at the biggest of the males. "Missed clean," said Saltana, who was behind me. I did not say much; but I thought a good deal as we made our way to the spot where the animals

Head of goa.

had been. There was no beast lying dead as there ought to have been, and I was beginning to think that Saltana must have been right, when Gesso, who had wandered on in the direction taken by the frightened animals, gave a shout. On coming up to him we saw the ground covered with blood, and a few yards farther on came upon the burhel lying dead with a bullet through his heart. It was quite extraordinary what a distance he had carried on in spite of an expanding bullet straight through a vital spot. The burhel's horn is of a peculiar shape, unlike any other animal that I know of, and different from all other sheep that I have seen, and there is no doubt that the generic name of *ovis* would be, as suggested by General Kinloch, a more suitable one than the one now adopted. The animal himself appears to be half sheep and half goat; and his flesh is exceedingly good eating, as I very soon found out, and what with hashed gazelle and burhel chops, I lived pretty well for the next few days. This, however, by the way.

We had hardly finished skinning and cutting up the dead beast when we spied another lot settling among some rocks over which we had come while stalking the first lot. This was great luck, for the place seemed good for a stalk, and after a short detour we were crawling cautiously about among the rocks above them. Having got near enough for a shot, I had great difficulty in making out the largest, for, owing to the peculiar shape of the horns, it is very difficult to judge of their size unless the head is turned either straight towards one or straight away from one, and I lay quite close to them examining them anxiously for a long time before I made up my mind which to fire at. Having at length come to a decision, I waited for a good opportunity and then fired, and had the

satisfaction of seeing him spurt for 100 yards and then tumble over dead. We got back to camp soon after 3 P.M., amid the rejoicing of all, for this meant meat for them in plenty, and the way in which they attacked it afforded a display of keen appetites if not of refined manners.

Head of burhel.

The next day I started off again at 5 A.M. and got over an immense amount of ground, but saw nothing like the number of burhel I had seen on the previous day. In fact, I only saw a single male, and he not a very big one. Still, he gave me an exciting stalk, and just as he was beginning to move uneasily, and seemed to be on the point of bolting, I shot him. The next day was Sunday, and I did not go out shooting, but got through a good long march, getting back to the Hanle *gompa* by evening. I had since first camping here made a large circle round an extensive tract of country to the south-east, and been very lucky in the way of sport, bagging during the time two *nyân*, two *goa*, and three burhel, or *napoo* as they are called by the Tartars.

Monday the 17th I went over the hills on the left bank of the Hanle river, camp moving down along the river-bank. I got to camp early in the afternoon, having seen no game worth troubling about, and was sitting writing when I was roused from the quiet

and peace of my tent by loud shouts and a great commotion outside. On going out to see what was the matter, I was met by Ram Pershad triumphantly flourishing on high a fish, evidently in a state of huge delight in the possession of it. My enterprising followers had entertained the idea that fish would make a pleasant variation in the daily diet, and were proceeding to carry out their idea as follows. Just outside camp a small island in the river formed a

Camped on the Haula river.

narrow channel of water, across one end of which two of the men stretched a linen loin-cloth, borrowed from Ram Pershad, in place of a net. The rest then jumped into the water at the top end and moved slowly towards the trap, splashing and shouting as they went, and thoroughly enjoying the fun. When within a few yards of it the loin-cloth was hauled up, and, lo and behold, half-a-dozen fish therein! I am unable to say what they were, but found them quite fit to eat.

On the opposite side of the river was a small encampment of the usual black bell-shaped tents of the Champa folk, which turned out to be the temporary home of Gesso and his father, the latter of whom came over to pay me a visit. He told me he had often in days gone by accompanied Kinloch on his expeditions after game, but that he was far too old for such exertion now. On my asking him how old he was he shook his head sadly, saying that he had ceased keeping count since his sixtieth year, which was now long passed.

For some days after this I had to put up with hard work and no reward. My bad luck began the very next day, when, having crossed the river, I spied two fine male *nyáñ* on the range of mountains which runs along the right bank and parallel to the Hanle river. One of them seemed to be a particularly fine ram, and I was very anxious to secure him. We got to within 400 or 500 yards, when, owing to the nature of the ground, we were unable to get any nearer, and were obliged to stay where we were watching them, hoping that they would either feed towards us or at anyrate to a more favourable place for a stalk. We had been watching them thus for some time, our attention kept fixed intently on their every movement, for they were feeding and moving first one way and then another as fancy or the few scattered tufts of vegetation which happened to catch their eye dictated, when the wind, that fearful bugbear which is for ever and exasperatingly forcing itself upon the sportsman's attention, veered round and blew for one short moment with a fitful mocking gust from the very worst possible direction. Let me not dwell on the next few seconds, when two heads, each surmounted with a magnificent pair of horns, shot up

into the air simultaneously, and after a single sniff at the tainted breeze turned and disappeared over a brow in the opposite direction. There was no time to give vent to expressions of feeling, or it is probable that the air would have been tainted with something more than the odour of man, for Gesso, more from eagerness to secure one of the fine heads, I fancy, than from deduction from his knowledge of the habits of the beast, in which he was seldom at fault, at once started off on their tracks, saying that as they could have seen nothing, and only got a faint puff of our wind, they might go but a short way before pulling up and settling again. Though from what I knew of the beast I considered that the least likely thing they would do would be to pull up before they had put thirty or forty miles or more behind them, I was constrained to follow him, and away we went as hard as we could to the top of the nearest point of vantage for a view of the country.

They had not wasted much time in getting out of harm's way, for by the time we got to the top of the mound we were climbing not a sign of any living creature was to be seen, and after the first wild rush for a sight of them, we steadied ourselves and settled down to track them.

In the extraordinary dry atmosphere of Ladak there is little beyond time to efface tracks made in the burnt-up sandy soil, and for three long days we kept steadily along the trail, brought to a halt now and then when it took us over more stony ground where the footprints were for the time being lost, only to be picked up again sooner or later by Gesso, whose proclivities for picking up a lost trail were simply marvellous, till at length on the evening of the third day we once more made out two rams feeding quietly on the edge of a

small ravine. Impatience and over-anxiety for a shot at one of them were probably the chief causes of my failure to come to terms with them on this occasion; but be that as it may, long before we were within range the phantom beasts were off once more on their wild career, and the last I ever saw of those two elusive rams was their hind-quarters as they were lost, as far as I was concerned, in the dim haze of distance.

For many days after this I toiled over interminable mountains of sand and shale, camping at great heights, where the cold was bitter at nights and the heat of the sun intense by day, with no tittle of success to reward my efforts. Often as I toiled over the huge burnt-up wastes, which give the uplands of Tibet the appearance of a land forsaken and accursed, scorched by the burning noonday sun, chilled by the bitter blasts by night, fed on the unappetising productions of a Kashmiri cook, more unsavoury than ever since dung had become the only fuel obtainable, and, when sport was poor, the few tough sheep secured from the wandering Tartars the only source of staple food, I wondered wherein lay the extraordinary attraction which drew me willy-nilly from the comforts and luxuries of modern life to wander solitary over the dreary tracts of this forbidding land. Is it the unfettered freedom of the desert which stirs the instinct of the savage that lies dormant in our nature but not dead? Or is it some subtle fascination in the grand solitude of nature which draws one on, holding one spellbound by some mysterious force? Who can say? Hope that springs eternal, that at any moment a beast worthy of any hardships and trouble may be stalked and shot, doubtless has something to do with it; but I do not think that that is all.

One day I got a shot at a fine *nyáñ* after a long and tiring stalk, but missed him clean. On stepping the distance I found it to be 250 yards, whereas I had judged it at 100 yards, and as I was using the express rifle the bullet undoubtedly fell short. I found I was frequently under-estimating distance in the clear rarefied air of these altitudes. The distance across a plain would appear to be but a few hundred yards when in reality it was several miles, and this was a cause of great annoyance when marching, when one could often see the spot one wished to reach apparently quite close, only to find that it took several hours to reach what appeared to be but a few minutes' walk away! The vague methods, too, employed by the Tartars to describe distance seldom helped one to a realisation of the probable nearness or the reverse of any particular object. One popular way among them is to describe a place as being so many *miythong* off, a *migthong* being the distance at which a man can be seen with the naked eye, which in the clear air of Ladak is probably about two miles. Another delightfully vague way they have is of describing a place as so many *thán* or plateaux away. As the plateaux vary in size from a few hundred yards to several miles, the amount of knowledge obtained from such a description is obvious.

So the days passed by with little variation till on the 27th July, after crossing a range of mountains on the extreme east of Ladak, I came upon humanity once more in the shape of a Champa encampment in the valley of Koyul. From here I settled to strike into the country to the north, and penetrate into the desolate and uninhabited waste known as Chang Chenmo in quest of the Tibetan antelope. Much to my regret Gesso here left me, saying he did not know

the country I wished to go into, and must now go back and help his father to tend his flocks. A finer stalker, a better servant, or a more cheery companion I never hope to meet, and my sorrow at parting with him was very genuine. I also parted with the yāk-drivers, who had now been with me for about three weeks, and having engaged fresh ones from the Tartars here, started northwards on the 28th. During the day I reached a small deserted village of about a dozen miserable huts, the villagers all being away, pasturing their flocks in different parts during the short summer. Still it was a village, the first I had seen, with the exception of the Hanle *gompa*, since leaving Gya on June 21. On the 29th I once more reached the Indus, close to where it flows out of Chinese Tibet, and as it lay

across my path had to cross it as best I could. It was broad and pretty deep; but having removed most of my clothes, I got across all right on my pony. The yāks had all to be unloaded, and the men carried the loads across on their heads, three or four crossing together and holding one another by the hand. Khada Bux was very energetic, going backwards and forwards and fetching things across, and caused much amusement by invariably falling off his pony in the deepest part of the river, though I am glad to say he confined these antics to going back and not coming, when he had baggage with him. Everything having been safely landed, the yāks and goats were hauled across, the latter making a fine commotion when their turn came. We marched a few miles along the right bank of the river before camping near the water's edge for the night.

Four more days due north, during the whole of which time we could see the peak at the foot of which our destination lay, brought us to the village of Shooshal, a hamlet of quite a respectable size, always considering the country in which it is situated. The Indus had turned west, and we had left it on the 30th; but before doing so I managed to shoot several duck. I was also lucky enough to pick up a few pigeons the other days and one or two hares, the latter much resembling the blue hare of Scotland, all of which made a most welcome addition to the pot. I found a halt at Shooshal necessary in which to collect provisions and transport, as the country ahead of me, after the first few days' journey, was devoid of human habitation or resources of any kind; and I also engaged a villager, Pommer by name, to accompany me as guide and shikarie into the wild and desolate regions

of Chang Chenmo. For food I bought sheep from the villagers and collected a small flock to drive along with my baggage at an average cost of 1s. 8d. a-head! This sounds cheap, no doubt; but the amount of meat to be got off a Tartar sheep at this time of year is microscopic.

CHAPTER VIII.

SPORT IN CHANG CHENMO.

Leaving Shooshal—The Pangoon Lake—A Tibetan sheep-dog—Polurang—The Marsemik La—Chang Chenmo—Tsyrin Tibetan—Travelling light—Amateur cooking—Antelope sighted—And shot—Another antelope wounded and secured—A rough night—An icy stream and camp once more—Wild yāk—Chances of finding a bull—A lucky shot—Yāk and *nyāñ* sighted—Return to the Chang Chenmo river—Hot springs of Kyam—The Tatahore nullah—Antelope shot—Across the border—Scarcity of water—Two more antelope shot—Great cold—The Kieu La—Polurang again—Buddhist method of avoiding evil—Churlish behaviour of "Mon"—Tankse—The Chang La—Chimray—The Indus again—After *sharpoo*—Unexpected behaviour of same, and death of two—Tent on fire—Another *sharpoo* shot.

ALL the arrangements possible, at so primitive a base, having been completed, I left Shooshal on the 4th of August, marching still in a northerly direction. A few miles brought us to the Pangoon Lake (13,936 feet), and I was obliged to travel along its banks, altering my course to north-west. The lake, though of no great breadth,—not more than a mile or two across,—forms with the Nyak Tso, to which it is joined by a narrow channel, an expanse of water of great length, close on ninety miles in all.

A tramp of some miles along the water's edge brought me to a small stream flowing through grass and low scrub, where I stumbled on to a covey of

partridges, out of which I bagged four. I also marked down some pigeons, and as it was a good place to camp at, halted for the night. The scenery here was grander and more rugged than I had seen for some time. Tiers of mountains rose up on each side of the great stretch of water at my feet, and snow-capped peaks were more numerous than they had been in the Hanle district.

For two more days I marched up the Pangoon Lake, reaching on the afternoon of the 6th a small village to the north-west of it, called Pobrang. On the way I had noticed, on passing a small settlement of shepherds, a number of Tibetan sheep-dog puppies, and asking the woman to whom they appeared to belong if she would sell one, I became the owner of a golden-haired Tibetan dog, the sum paid being one rupee! He was a jolly little beggar, and henceforth "Mon," as I called him after the place from which I had bought him, was my constant companion in my tent and on the march.

Pobrang, which at this time was inhabited only by a few women,—the men being away with their sheep,—was the last sign of human habitation I should see; for in front loomed huge mountain-barriers, beyond which lay the great desolate wastes of Chang Chenmo and the towering heights of the Karakoram Mountains. It became much colder as I got farther north, and on the night of the 6th a lot of snow fell on the hills all round.

On the 7th I camped at a small spring at the foot of the Marsemik La, which I hoped to cross the next day. The morning of the 8th broke wild and stormy. Dense masses of cloud, black and threatening, rolled down upon the mighty mountains, whose peaks were lost to view in a dense bank of cloud. Slowly and labouring we toiled towards the summit of the pass, a height of 18,420 feet, reaching freshly fallen snow some distance

short of it, when the cold became intense. At the top we halted for a few moments before commencing the descent on the far side. The wildness of the scene is past description, and well calculated to inspire the boldest spirit with awe. The wind shrieked, the storm-clouds burst and belched forth hail and snow, while here and there, where the mist was rent asunder for a moment by eddying squalls of wind, great masses of gloomy mountain became visible, calm and unmoved amid the fierceness of the storm, filling one with an overwhelming sense of littleness before their sublime grandeur, and inspiring one with ideas, in their cold calmness, of a pitiless inexorable Fate. Truly at such a time and in such a place, amid the eerie wailing of the wind and the fury of the storm, one might well expect to hear the weeping and moaning of lost souls, pursued remorselessly by the gruesome ghouls of their devil-haunted religion, driven bewildered from the narrow road to Nirvana, and lost in a chaos of impenetrable night.

We wasted but little time amid this battle of the elements; but made our way with all haste down the far side of the pass, and having reached a hollow by a clear stream, more or less sheltered by surrounding rocks, pitched the tents and halted for the night.

All next day our way lay down hill, over barren rocks and stony wastes, till by evening we reached the Chang Chenmo river and camped on its banks. In the course of the next day we crossed the Chang Chenmo, and striking into the mountains to the north, reached a tributary stream, the Kugrang Sanspo, where we camped for the night.

About this time one of the Ladakis who had been with me as post-runner left me, pleading ignorance of this part of the country; but he had had the

sense, on the occasion of his last return from Leh, to bring with him another man to take his place, which latter individual had duly presented himself, and engaged, if need be, to accompany me to the ends of the world! He was a wild Tibetan from over the border, with an honest smiling face and long strings of matted hair, who, despite his inability to speak anything but his own jargon, and an off-hand way of treating the Kashmiris, whom he looked down upon with scornful contempt, proved to be an excellent servant and devoted follower. The Kashmiris, as was perhaps not altogether unnatural, took an intense dislike to him, snorting with rage at the lack of respect which they considered due from a wild savage to such highly civilised beings as themselves (!), and which they were entirely unsuccessful in getting. Indeed it seemed that he did treat them with scant courtesy, their fawning, lying ways appealing to him not at all; and I afterwards heard that he gave them to understand that he would think nothing of putting a term to their present existence if they made themselves in the least objectionable, as he feared nor man nor devil, and could laugh at justice from the secure fastnesses of the little-known regions across the border. He, however, always treated me with the greatest respect, doing anything I told him (through the Ladaki post-runner, who could speak Hindustani) without a murmur, and I soon became exceedingly fond of this wild and simple son of the desert.

Camp now being pitched in a sufficiently good spot in a country patronised by the solitude-loving antelope of Tibet, I summoned Pommer to a consultation to decide upon the best way of proceeding, with the result that I settled to leave camp where it was for the present, and in the lightest of light marching order to

make an expedition of a few days into the extraordinary labyrinth of mountains to the north-east of the Kugrang Sanspo. Accordingly at 5 A.M. on the 11th, accompanied by Saltana, Pommer, and three of the yāk-drivers with a couple of ponies carrying the small amount of baggage that was absolutely necessary, I left camp, and having crossed the river, made my way into the interminable mountains beyond. For the greater part of the day we seemed to be going up hill, from which I imagine we were living at a great altitude for the next few days, as the river-bed where we left camp was about

Tsyrin, Tibetan.

15,000 feet, though owing to my aneroid having gone wrong and playing all sorts of tricks, I had no means of ascertaining at what height we actually were. During the day we came across some antelope and tried to stalk them, but our chances were spoilt by a herd of *kyang*, which unwelcome creature seemed to swarm in the country, and I only got a running shot at about 300 yards, which proved useless. After this failure we crossed a pass, described as the Kiepsang La, and fixed up the small *tente d'abri* over the other side, near a good spring, at a height probably of something like 18,000 feet.

It was just 6.30 when we got things fixed up, and I set to work to cook some dinner. Theoretically there is something exciting and pleasing about the idea of cooking one's own dinner in the open after a hard day's work, but in practice the operation hardly comes up to the ideal. To begin with, I found that a fire of dry dung mixed with a few roots which the yāk-drivers had collected was not altogether the one I should choose, if any choice were possible; and then as soon as the sun had set the fall in the temperature was enormous, and unduly retarded the culinary operations, as well as numbing one's hands. My kitchen consisting of one sauce-pan and one frying-pan, dinner was not a meal of many courses, and after making some soup in one and cooking some meat in the other, I gave up, thinking that the trouble of cleaning the cooking-pots with water that was rapidly turning to ice, and trying to cook anything more over the smouldering smoky embers of the apology for a fire, would be wasted, and assisted by hunger, that most excellent of all sauces, soon made the most of what there was before turning in for the night. This done I soon retired to rest on the hard

and stony ground which formed my bed, for the tent was small, and beyond the two cooking-pots my belongings consisted of a Wolseley valise, my blankets, and a tin basin!

Waking soon after five o'clock, I got up and made breakfast. On looking round I found I was camped in a sort of natural basin, surrounded on all sides by barren peaks, and having at one end the Kiepsang La, by which I had entered in the evening. Breakfast eaten, I started off with Pommer and Saltana in search of antelope, and was lucky enough, after having been going about an hour, to catch sight of two animals feeding on a flat bit of ground some distance from us. To stalk them where they were was quite out of the question, so for want of better occupation we sat down to watch them. After a time they began feeding up hill, and as soon as they were out of sight over a ridge we followed them. Just as we got to the top of the ridge I caught sight of the bigger of the two, about 150 yards off, and took the rifle to try a shot. He must, however, have got a touch of our wind, for he started off before I could fire; but luck being for once on my side, he pulled up after a short quick spurt to look round, and, pushing up the 200-yards sight on the express, I had the gratification a moment later of seeing him through the evaporating smoke tumble on to his back stone-dead. Experience had taught me much in judging distance in clear rarefied air, and on this occasion I had hit it off successfully, as on stepping the distance I found it to be exactly 220 yards.

It was only just midday, so after a short halt in which to "gralloch" the dead beast, I started again, and before very long made out four more antelope. They, too, were in an impossible place for a stalk, owing to an entire absence of any cover, and though

I tried to get at them from every point of the compass, found no possible way for a successful stalk, and at last, as it was getting late, made up my mind to crawl slowly along the ground perfectly flat, and trust to luck to getting within shot before I was discovered. When within 200 or 300 yards of them they noticed me, and after a moment's hesitation scampered off slantwise up the side of some hills opposite, followed by a harmless bullet from the express. A lucky shot from the mauser, however, a good deal to my own surprise, hit the hindermost of them in the hind-leg, disabling him to a certain extent, though he went on out of sight some way in rear of the rest. As I toiled slowly up the mountain-side over the brow of which he had vanished, I began to almost wish that I had missed him altogether, till at length a sight of him lying down by himself put new energy into me, and after an exciting crawl down hill, I got within shot and gave him a *coup de grâce* at six o'clock. Though nothing out of the way, he had a nice pair of horns of 22 inches, which serve to remind me now, when seated in a comfortable arm-chair, of a hard day's work and an exciting stalk in the mountains of wild Chang Chenmo.

Head of Tibetan antelope.

It was eight o'clock when I got back to my tent, and realising that if I wanted any dinner I would have to

cook it, I at once set about it, corroborating the mental note that I had made the night before to the effect that cooking one's dinner over a flickering fire, in an icy wind, when dead tired, is not the most amusing of occupations.

The next day I went in a more easterly direction, but was out of luck,—as I toiled all day and saw nothing. The night of the 13th was destined to be of a most unpleasant description. I had not been asleep long when I was waked by loud peals of thunder and blinding flashes of lightning, while the rain came down like a waterspout and soaked the wretched little single-fly tent through in no time. It was bitterly cold too, and towards morning the rain turned to snow, so that when at last I ventured to crawl out of my blankets nothing but vast stretches of dazzling whiteness were to be seen in every direction. My poor followers, who had nothing beyond their great untanned sheepskin coats, must have passed a terrible night, and their cheerfulness under the circumstances excited my highest admiration.

There had been a fall of some inches, and cooking, which had been troublesome before, was now almost impossible, and when I gazed upon the result of half an hour's manipulation of snow, wet roots, and cooking utensils, with the thermometer at goodness knows what, I came to the conclusion that I was quite ready to throw myself once more on the tender mercies of Khada Bux, and ordered the ponies to be loaded. This done, I sent the Ladakis straight off to camp, while I took a more roundabout course myself in the hope of finding antelope. In this I was disappointed, and after wading through a very icy mountain torrent, in which I was almost swept away, and probably should have been quite had not Saltana managed to

seize hold of me and hang on when I lost my footing, reached camp on the Kugrang Sanspo once more.

On the 15th it began snowing heavily at 4 A.M., and continued to do so till ten o'clock, so that I did not strike camp till eleven, and then only did a short march, as the tents were soaking, and I was glad to pitch them so as to allow them to dry as soon as the sun came out.

We made our way up the right bank of the river, through a scene of the wildest desolation; for I had seen tracks of wild yāk, leading apparently towards the river source, and hoped to come across them. On the following day I was rewarded, after marching ten or twelve miles, by the sight of a large herd of the yāk or *dong*, as the Ladakis call them. They were too far off for us to be able to make out whether there were any big bulls among them, and it was too late to go after them that day, so after noting carefully where they settled, I retraced my steps, and having met camp, which was following us, pitched it on the left bank of the river.

It was very cold when we started at five o'clock the next morning, and must have been freezing pretty hard; but as soon as the sun got well up it was pleasant enough. Some hours' steady walking brought us to the place where we had last seen the wild yāk; but they, it seemed, had left for other parts, for though we searched the ground all round with the glasses, we saw no sign of them, and had to content ourselves with stalking a flock of burhel which we discovered feeding in a small ravine.

The Chang Chenmo district is by no means a certain find for wild bulls, and in the summer there is no likelihood of coming across a big bull so far west, as, according to the Tartars, they move east into the less

accessible regions of Chinese Tibet in the spring. In the autumn, however, there is always a chance of finding them, as they appear to make their way to the comparatively sheltered valleys there from the bleak uplands beyond, and my Ladakis assured me that if I would remain till winter I should be certain of getting a specimen. They probably knew that they were fairly safe in saying this, for it would require a very big inducement to make any one *think of* remaining in the country for the winter if he could possibly avoid doing so; but all the same, they were probably quite right, as the bulls would probably come to join the cows in the autumn, and cows there were, for I saw them myself. Farther east some days' journey into Chinese Tibet wild yāk abound, and I know of sportsmen who have journeyed through the Chang Chenmo valley and returned from the country a few days' journey over the border with a fine bag of bulls' horns and skins to show. But to return to the burhel. We made several attempts before finding a possible way of approach; but when we did we actually found ourselves within a few yards of two of the animals who were lying down. Unfortunately they were facing me, and the nature of the ground was such that I could only see their horns without exposing myself. I tried to bring the rifle slowly to my shoulder, but in doing so displaced a stone, and the whole flock were up and away like a flash. Jumping up, I waited in the hope that they would pull up, which they did after the first rush, but were all standing straight away from me. I noticed one, however, looking back over his shoulder, and thinking I should not get a better chance, snapped off the rifle. He was standing in such a position that only his hind-legs and head were visible, and when the smoke cleared away I am bound to say I was a good

deal astonished to see him lying on his back. The bullet had hit him in the head, entering under the left ear and coming out just behind the right nostril. This is no shooting yarn, but an accurate record of a lucky shot, for which I take absolutely no credit, hitting him in the head being a hopeless fluke, as when I hurriedly threw up the rifle and fired I had very little idea as to whether I was even drawing a bead on the beast at all. The head was a very respectable one, with a fine massive horn twenty-four inches in length.

While still camped on the left bank of the Kugrang Sanspo I made my way up a small tributary stream flowing into it from the north, where I once more came across the herd of wild yāk I had before sighted, resting on a steep hillside. This time I was able to examine them carefully with the glass, and was a good deal disappointed to find that it contained no big bull. I also saw some male *nyáñ* on the same ground, but an attempt to stalk them was unsuccessful, and I never saw them again.

Thinking that the probability of seeing more game in the immediate neighbourhood was small, I retraced my steps, leaving camp in the early morning, and by means of a forced march reached the spot where I had been camped on the 15th by evening. It was very cold when I started, the thermometer registering 17° of frost, and everything was as hard as iron; but the dry cold here was a far pleasanter climate for hard marching than the fearful heat of the sun on the Hanle highlands earlier in the summer, and was nothing to grumble at, especially when the sun had risen and taken the bite of the hour before dawn from the air.

On the 20th we reached the Chang Chenmo river, and crossing it early in the morning before the midday spate from melting snow and ice came down, camped

a short distance farther up the valley, beyond some hot springs known as Kyam. The night was rough and stormy, and it required something of an effort to drag me from the comparative warmth and comfort of my tent to face the howling wind and driving snow-storms which were raging madly outside. The weather improved with the day, however, and marching along ahead of camp, up the Chang Chenmo river, I saw a fair quantity of antelope, and got shots on two occasions, but was unlucky enough to lose them both.

Leaving the river on our left, we moved into the Tatahore nullah,—marked on the map as Kone Rong, —where I saw a quantity of antelope; but the ground was very bad for stalking purposes, being flat and affording no cover. The weather, too, became very stormy in the afternoon, sharp showers of hail and snow being particularly unpleasant. Camp was pitched by a small patch of grass under lee of a hill, which afforded a certain amount of protection against the furious winds common to these parts; but all round on every side spread the great wastes of dreary desert, which never seemed to vary, and I began to long for the sight of a tree or anything to break the terrible monotony of the view.

I worked the Tatahore nullah for another day, and after an unsuccessful stalk on the flat bottom of the nullah, was lucky enough to spy some antelope lying down on a fairly steep hillside. An hour or two's climbing brought us to within about 300 yards of them; but we then found further approach from where we were to be impossible. While lying flat watching them in the hope that they might move one way or the other, it occurred to me that by stalking them from the other side I could get a great deal nearer to them; so telling Pommer to follow me, I cautiously

withdrew and began the stalk afresh. I was even more successful than I had dared to hope, for by slow and careful crawling I got to within 60 yards of the antelope, who were still lying down. It was a steep shaly hillside, and as long as they continued to lie down I could only see their horns, so prepared to wait till they got up. I soon found that the prolonged stay in a cramped and motionless position became irksome, and began slowly raising the rifle to see what the sights looked like, an action which attracted the attention of a watchful beast, who promptly got up and faced me. The light was good and the sights clear, and I immediately planted a bullet in his chest. The rest made themselves scarce in very quick time; but I had a quick shot with the mauser at them as they retreated, without however doing them any harm. The dead beast had a horn of 23 inches, with a curious twist in one of the horns, which rather detracted from the symmetrical appearance of the head as a trophy. I had a great crow over Pommer, who had only succeeded in getting up to within 300 yards of the beasts, while I had crawled up to within 60; but though a hard-working man, he was nothing very great in the way of a stalker, and not to be compared with Gesso, and I found I was generally more successful in approaching game by myself than when allowing him to accompany me in the final approach.

The next day I crossed the border into Chinese Tibet, into a district known as Troakpo Kurpo, a barren and uninhabited waste differing in no respect from Chang Chenmo, and considered unworthy of the attentions of a Tartar guard to keep off strangers, though such a guard does exist, I believe, at a spot on the border a little farther to the south.

We had great difficulty in finding water to camp by,

having finally to drag the tents close up to the snow, where the cold as soon as the sun went down was extreme. All night long it froze hard, and the thermometer was still some degrees below freezing-point inside my tent while I was having breakfast the next morning, and when we started we made the pace a pretty warm one to set the circulation going. A long hard day added nothing to the bag, though I saw a fair amount of game, and had a shot or two at various ranges; but the day following I bagged a couple of antelope, one in rather a curious manner. I had been wriggling along over very bare ground when one of the three antelope I was stalking became alarmed and bolted, immediately of course followed by the other two. I took a hurried shot at the best of the three, missing him, and, as he galloped away, missed him again with the second rifle. Putting up the 300-yards sight I tried once more, and had the satisfaction of seeing him fall; but the curious part of it was that Pommer swore that the bullet struck the ground, ricochetted, and then went into the beast, who was about 400 yards off. Whether this was a fact or not I am unable to say; though Pommer was quite positive he saw the dust fly up between us and the animal almost at the moment that he fell. It was while skinning this beast that I caught sight of another herd not very far off, and got a nice head of 23 inches from it after a successful stalk.

Antelope seemed to be very plentiful, and no doubt the farther east one penetrated the more one would see; but being satisfied with what I had got, I sent one of the men who was with me back to bring camp on, and marched on south for a few miles, halting for the night on the almost dried-up bed of a stream known as the Mippal Loomba. Next day I followed

the course of the river, which flowed between great mountains of shale and stone in a south-westerly direction, and camped at the foot of a nullah coming down from the north. The morning of the 27th I spent searching the nullah for game; but seeing nothing worth a shot, continued south-west, reaching a patch of tamarisk-bush, where I camped for the night. A little farther on I saw some *nyán*, but failed to get near them, and on the 29th did a long march up hill all day, camping for the night at a spot some way up the Kieu La, on the frontier. The cold during the night was terrible, and in spite of sleeping-bag and blankets I was perpetually waked up by cold pure and simple. Snow fell during the night, but in the early hours of the morning it cleared up and settled down to freeze. I had unfortunately forgotten to put out the thermometer, so am unable to say exactly how much frost there was; but that the temperature fell pretty low was proved by the water in the basin in my tent being frozen solid.

At 6.30 A.M. I crawled out of my sleeping-bag shivering with cold, and hastily pulled on my clothes, and having partaken of breakfast, started on the ascent of the pass. The faint grey light of dawn revealed a lifeless frozen land wrapped in a mantle of chill white snow, across which shrieked and whistled a biting icy wind which cut through one like a knife, taking one's breath away, and causing one to pant and gasp like a fish out of water.

By 9 A.M. I reached the summit of the pass, from which I could look down in every direction on to a perfect sea of mountain-peaks. What the height of the pass actually was I am unable to say, for my aneroid had long since ceased to afford reliable information, playing the most surprising tricks on the very

slightest provocation; but, roughly speaking, should put it down at about 19,000 feet, as the summit of the Mersemik La (18,420 feet) lay below me, and I had a downhill walk of nearly an hour before reaching the latter. Here I rested for a short while, and then went on to a former camping-ground of mine, where there was a little grass and a tiny pool of water, which was now frozen. Waiting till the baggage hove in

Some of my Tartar yak-drivers.

sight, I went on to the village of Pobrang, which I reached about 4 P.M., a small sign of human habitation which was welcome enough after a sojourn of over three weeks in the solitary wastes of uninhabited Chang Chenmo.

On the 31st I did a long march to a little place called Mugli, which I reached at 4.30. Ram Pershad did not turn up till late in the evening, and I took him to task

for loitering on the way, when he told me that he had stopped to inspect a Buddhist devotee who was living in a cave in the mountains, and who had, according to general belief, been sitting in a contemplative position for some years. There seems to be a tendency in Buddhism to affect this negative method of leading a virtuous or rather non-evil life, the idea being, I suppose, that as long as you are doing nothing you cannot be doing evil, and I have a very vivid recollection of the first occasion on which I came in contact with a striking example of an individual leading this curious existence. It was in the early hours of the morning, an hour or so before dawn, and the place the steep and rocky sides of Adam's Peak, over which still hangs a veil of the romance of the East. We had been climbing since midnight, ascending through the heavy silence of a still tropical night to the cooler and fresher air of the mountain-top at dawn, and were passing through a thick patch of luxuriant vegetation amid which the white moonbeans shone in silvery patches, when the dead hush all round was suddenly broken by a weird mysterious chant rising seemingly out of the solitude of the great gloomy mountain. I pulled up involuntarily, filled with a curious sensation of expectancy, aroused by the strange sounds and my mysterious surroundings, half ready to accept a supernatural explanation of what a little further investigation proved to be a quite natural phenomenon. Hidden in the deep shade of the jungle was a natural cave, in which were living half-a-dozen devotees, whose midnight prayers had thus disturbed the silence of the night; but it was still farther on, and nearer the great imprint on the summit of the sacred mountain, variously described as Adam's footstep and Mahommet's, according to the religion of the believer, that the true

example of a negative existence was to be found. Here in a mere cleft in the rock, seated motionless with the far-away stare as of one in a trance, the dead expression of the face heightened by an unnatural pallor, existed an individual of Chinese origin, happy in the knowledge of a blameless life. The face, which was drawn and hollow, was hardly expressive of great happiness perhaps; but this was not altogether to be wondered at if local information was to be believed, which described the subject as having been sitting in the same identical position, silent and motionless, for five years, supported only by a single teaspoonful of some Chinese elixir daily! All things taken into consideration, I felt, as I gazed on the corpse-like figure, that a more positive existence, even if it necessitated the committing of a certain amount of evil, was infinitely preferable.

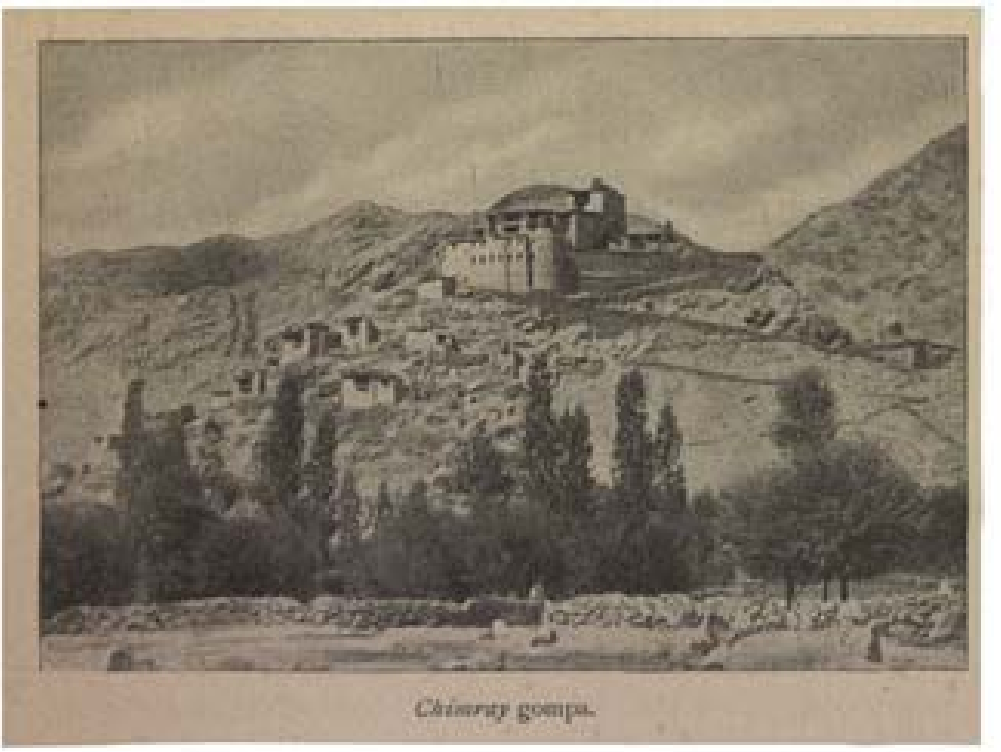
While waiting for the servants and camp to come up I had a good deal of fun in stalking pigeons, which were feeding in the vicinity of the village in considerable numbers. Having only eight shot-gun cartridges I did not indulge in sporting shots, but spent most of the time in trying to approach unnoticed, and to get as many of the birds in a line as possible; for a long course of unvaried mutton diet had heightened the value of any other food in my eyes to a degree, and engendered a desperate longing for variety of any sort. On approaching the village Mon showed an alarming tendency to fly savagely at every one he saw, and succeeded in biting one luckless villager rather severely. He had evidently not got used to strangers, and seemed to strongly resent the existence of any one beyond his own little circle of acquaintances, who he evidently considered were the only beings who had any right to existence at all.

Leaving Mugli at 8 A.M., I marched nine miles to Tankse, a large village, where I obtained fresh yāks. Thence on for another seven miles along the bottom of a narrow valley till I reached the village of Dargoo, where I camped for the night at an altitude of about 13,000 feet, the lowest ground I had been on since June 19!

On leaving Dargoo on the 2nd, I found my way led up hill again, and pretty steep too. At eight miles I came on a small plateau and water, where I could have camped; but not wishing to dawdle along through such uninteresting country, pushed on, and four or five miles farther on came to the summit of the Chang La, 17,600 feet, a rise of nearly 5000 feet during the day. Going on about three miles down the far side of the pass, I reached a good enough spot for pitching camp, where I waited for the baggage, which did not turn up till 8 P.M., and precious cold work it was waiting after the sun had gone down. The following day I had a nine-mile walk all down hill, and reached the quaint-looking village of Chimray, with its *gompa* perched as usual on the top of rocks overhanging the village. On the 4th I once more reached the Indus, and marching down its right bank, camped at Ranbipur, near which I had heard *sharpoo* were to be found. *Sharpoo* there were, but in no great quantity, and what there were, were terribly wild. I spent one or two days going slowly down the right bank of the river, climbing about on the most trying ground when not marching, in the vain hope of getting on terms with these mountain sheep, but with so little success that I never even let my rifle off; and on the evening of the 7th I crossed the Indus and reached the ground where I had camped and shot in June.

I had made up my mind not to return to Leh till I

had got what I wanted, and as soon as the faint grey light warned me of the approach of dawn, I was off and climbing the mountains in search of game. I found some beasts, and stalked them; but when I reached the place from which I hoped to get a shot I found myself in a most awkward position. I was flat on the ground, on the edge of an almost perpendicular cliff, with the sheep about 150 yards straight below me.



Chimray gompa.

I made Saltana hold on to my heels while I wriggled to the edge and got the rifle over. From here I tried to shoot, but am almost certain that I shot far over him, and before I could do anything more they were out of sight.

Sharpoo are cussed beasts, and two that I spied and tried to stalk early on the morning of the 9th proved no exception to the rule; for after having induced me to go through a long and most exhausting climb, over

ground of the most trying description, they waited until I was just about to make the final approach for a shot, and then cantered quietly off in the opposite direction. This time, however, I was to have my revenge, for after they had tired of exercise and settled down to feed again, I managed to crawl up to within about 200 yards of them undiscovered. Try as I would, however, I could not for the life of me draw a satisfactory bead on them, for they were so exactly the colour of the ground that when I did fire I could not tell at all whether my bead was drawn on the beast or not. That I missed did not surprise me in the slightest; but that the beast, instead of galloping straight away, should make straight for me, did surprise me. I was well concealed behind a rock, and when he stopped within 100 yards of me, shot him dead with the mauser rifle. I then turned my attention to the other, which was nowhere to be seen. Suddenly as I was crawling about among the rocks, in case he should happen to be anywhere in the vicinity, I came face to face with him at very close quarters. In the excitement of the moment I snapped the rifle off at him, without taking any aim, breaking his foreleg. He took me a fearful climb, and when at last I got up to him, and finished him with a bullet through the neck, he went crashing down the steep incline we were on till stopped by Saltana, who was far below skinning the first.

Great was the rejoicing in camp when the two beasts were brought in, and fires were soon alight for cooking the meat. The result of all this was a most untoward occurrence, for just as I was getting into bed I was startled by a hissing and crackling, and a tremendous commotion outside, and before I knew where I was, found my tent in flames! It did not take me long to get out, and to set the men to work to throw skinfuls of

water on the burning canvas ; but by the time the fire was extinguished the whole of the back was burnt out, and a good deal of the top was nothing but a mass of black and charred cinders. A spark had been blown from one of the many fires all round, and set the canvas, which was as dry as tinder, alight.

I spent one more day among these hills, and finished up successfully by bagging another *sharpoo*. I found a flock early in the morning, but in an impossible place, so there was nothing to do but sit down and watch them, which we accordingly did, and waited for something like two hours before they showed any signs of moving. At length one by one they got up and began trailing down into a small nullah, and before long had all moved out of sight except one, which remained looking about in the most aggravating manner. At length, however, he too moved out of sight, enabling us to run and cut them off. The manœuvre turned out successfully, and getting within easy distance, I shot the biggest of the rams as they were moving slowly out of the nullah. I was walking up to the dead beast when strange weird sounds caught my ear ascending from the cliffs below. On going to investigate, I found the wild Tibetan Tsyrin, whom I had brought out to carry the lunch and who had watched the whole of the stalk from a coign of vantage, safely hidden behind a rock, chanting a pæan of victory at the death of the fallen animal! They often afforded me amusement, did these strange dwellers in the mountains, by their simplicity and quaint ideas, and I noticed that the local shikarie who accompanied me in these hills invariably raised my rifle to his forehead and muttered some sort of blessing over it before handing it to me to shoot.

CHAPTER IX.

BACK TO KASHMIR.

Leh again—The bazaar—Curios—Tibetan turquoises—Interview with a lama—Departure from Leh—Lamayuru—The Waccha *gompa*—Mulbeck—Kargil—A night vigil and a misfire—Tashgam—Dras—The snow-line—Zogi La in autumn—Snow-bear seen—The Kolun nullah—Rewill nullah—Black bears—Tent life in Kashmir—Hunting for barasingh—Night in the forest—Camp at Haroo—A mistake in the time—Daybreak on the mountain—One more futile bear-hunt—A search for serow—Shot at a barasingh—Night on the mountain-top—Hard work and a wounded stag—Back to camp—Gunderbal—Srinagar once more.

On the 11th I crossed the river and found myself once more in Leh, after an absence of three months. The place presented a very different appearance now to what it had on my previous visit. The main street and bazaar was on this occasion alive with merchants from all parts of Asia: Yarkundis with *numdahs*, furs, and skins; Hindus with cloth and finery from Delhi; Tibetans with turquoises, drugs, and tea from Lhasa,—all jostling one another and forming a polyglot crowd both striking and picturesque.

One day I spent several hours in the house of a Ladaki merchant examining a quaint collection of ornaments and curios: prayer-wheels of the country; copper and silver teapots from Lhasa; magnificent flowered silks from China; bricks of tea and turquoises;

and a host of other things, connected for the most part with their fantastic religion, from a pair of lama's boots to silver, brass, and copper prayer-boxes, containing small images of Buddha. The turquoises are of little value from the point of view of being precious stones, as they are never without flaws, and are seldom of a really good colour; but in Ladak they are in great request for making the *perak*, the strange head-dress worn by every

The main street of Leh.

Ladaki lady, who invests her worldly wealth in them, and hangs them sown in rows on a strip of cloth from her head. It is thus comparatively easy to form at a glance an opinion of the approximate wealth of any woman one may meet.

Another morning I was sitting idly outside the travellers' bungalow when a dirty disreputable-looking individual, in the garb of a lama, shuffled up and asked permission to speak with me inside. When we were

safely within he produced from under his flowing red robe some images of Buddha, which he said he had brought from his *gompa* and was willing to part with—for a consideration. I offered him half what he asked, and eventually became the possessor of them, though he grumbled a good deal at parting with them for what he considered a very inadequate price, for, he said, they were only made in Lhasa, besides which it was strictly against the laws of his religion to sell them, and he would most certainly be expelled from his monastery if he was found out. Having heard a good deal of the laxity of the sect known as the "Red lamas" or "Drukpas," who are in the majority in Ladak, I accepted the statement for what it was worth and retained the images.

The weather was now becoming colder, snow falling on the mountains round at nights, and I began to think of my journey back to Kashmir, and on the 14th left Leh and camped at Nimo after a march of eighteen miles. Forbidding, desolate, and inhospitable though the country is, I was filled with a strange regret at leaving it, and as I rode slowly away, looked round more than once at the capital I was leaving behind, and wondered whether I should ever see it again, or whether this one glimpse of it, with its curious people and strange religion and customs, would be the only one for me, to fade, as the years go by, to the dim haziness of a dream.

For the next day or two my road was the same, along the right bank of the Indus, that I had travelled in June; but on the 17th the highway to Kashmir took me across the river and into the mountains to the south. Ten or twelve miles from Khalsi, where I crossed the river, I came to the village of Lamayuru, where we camped for the night. The path for some

distance before reaching Lamayuru lay through a narrow defile, on each side of which rose up great piles and masses of conglomerate, worn by the progress of time into weird and fantastic shapes, resembling forts and battlements, and giant towers and palaces, making a fitting approach to the quaint village that it led to, where irregular-shaped houses were built in all sorts of unexpected corners, and even hollowed out of the cliffs themselves; while on the more level spots, near terraces of cultivation, might be seen the ox treading out the corn, carrying one back in memory to the days of the children of Israel and the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite.

A march of little interest over the usual barren expanses of Ladak, and leading over a pass of 13,400 feet, brought us to the village of Kharbu, where we camped for the night, and on the 19th we crossed another pass of 13,000 feet and reached Mulbeck. A mile or two before coming to the village I left the track, and crossing a low range of hills, reached a small place called Waccha, where I had heard there was a *gompa* of some interest hollowed out of a perpendicular cliff. A steep and winding path led up to the entrance, which consisted of a small door leading into the face of the cliff, but which we found securely locked. The lama in charge having been found, the door was opened, and we entered the sacred precincts. The *gompa* consisted of two chambers, partly hollowed out of the perpendicular cliff, and partly built up on a platform projecting from it, and contained the usual images, sacred books, and prayer-wheels, one of the latter being of a particularly large and formidable type, a few revolutions of which would be the means of working off an untold number of prayers.

From here I walked on to Mulbeck, at the east

end of which stands a huge upright rock with an enormous figure of Chamba—the Buddha that is to come—engraven in deep relief upon its surface. This extraordinary work of art, one is told, fell down, carved as it is, one night from heaven, and has remained in its present position ever since.

I had a long march the next day of twenty-four miles to Kargil, a large and flourishing village, and the meeting-point as it were of Ladak, Baltistan, and the Dras district. While here I heard that a post-runner had been stopped a few nights before by a bear a few miles farther along the track, and thought it would be worth while trying to bag him. I therefore went on to the Dras river, crossed it, and camped at a small village about two miles south of Hardas. This brought me on to the route which I had been following in March, but which now presented a very different appearance to what it had done then. At that time nothing was to be seen but brilliant dazzling snow; now there was no scrap of snow to be seen, but wherever there was a small village one saw terrace upon terrace of smiling crops of barley, amaranth, and other cereals.

I got hold of a villager, who informed me that the bear was only to be found abroad at nights, when he came down to feed on the outskirts of the village, so I made my plans accordingly. At 8 P.M. the moon rose, and taking a smoothbore loaded with ball, I made my way stealthily towards the place where the bear was supposed to come and feed. I had been sitting under a tree for about an hour when I made out a dark object moving about a couple of hundred yards off. Getting into some broken ground, I crawled up to within about 15 yards of the animal, and aiming as well as I could

in the moonlight, pressed the trigger. Misfire! and away went the bear. However, he had only heard the click, and I remained where I was, hidden among some rocks, on the chance of his returning. In about another hour's time back he came, and I crawled undetected to within 7 yards of him — I stepped the distance afterwards. At this distance I felt I could not miss, and pressed the trigger with some confidence. Another misfire!! So much for Kashmir cartridges. Of course the bear went off like a flash, this time thoroughly scared, and was no more seen. Two more nights I spent in the open keeping patient vigil, and watching the stars pursue their courses across the heavens; but the bear had evidently changed his haunts, for I never saw him again, and on the 24th I marched on seventeen miles to the village of Tashgam, camping close to the same serai in which I had spent the night of the 22nd of March.

Another march brought me to Dras, where I found it a good deal colder and saw a lot of snow on the mountains. It is very noticeable how much lower the snow-line is as one gets nearer the edge and farther away from the heart of the great mountain-system. Round about Hanle and in most parts of Ladak, which is completely surrounded by stupendous ranges of mountains, on which the bulk of moisture is deposited before reaching the interior, the line of perpetual snow is something over 21,000 feet, whereas farther south in Kashmir glaciers are common at heights of 15,000 and 16,000 feet, and here at Dras I found snow lying at from 11,000 to 12,000 feet. For the same reason the lower passes on the threshold of the mountains are far more dangerous in winter than much higher ones beyond,

and it is on these that the elements spend their fury in the terrific storms so well known and dreaded by the native.

On the 27th I crossed the Zogi La once more; but what a wonderful difference there was now to when I had first crossed it in the spring! Then it was simply a huge conglomerated mass of snow, whereas now it presented a scene of unparalleled magnificence. All

Gorge leading to summit of the Zogi La.

the trees, excepting of course the fir-trees, were clothed in every shade of colour, from a deep copper to a brilliant gold, and the whole place was one mass of lovely vegetation. The difference between this beautiful southern side of the pass and the scene of indescribable desolation presented by the northern side, which is innocent of any vegetation whatsoever, is one of the most striking things I have ever seen. Indeed on reaching the Kashmir side of the pass I could hardly

believe it possible that I could be within a few hours' walk of the country I had just left. Marching slowly down the winding path which runs along the side of the gorge, and which is the easy summer road across the pass, I pitched my tents at the mouth of the Baltal nullah, with the intention of spending a day or two in search of bears. The Sind valley in autumn is probably one of the most beautiful places to be found anywhere, certainly in Kashmir; and though the chances of sport there now are poor, partly owing to its having been so much shot over, and partly owing to the herds of goats and buffalo which are driven there to feed on the rich pasture of its nullahs and mountain-sides, yet there is a fascination in wandering with a rifle amid the magnificent scenery with which it abounds, and in the glorious invigorating air, and for a whole month I rambled over its huge forest-clad mountains in perfect enjoyment without so much as adding a single head of game to my bag.

The day after my arrival at Baltal I climbed up the wooded sides of the nullah leading to the famous cave of Ambanath, whither during the summer months devout Hindus make pilgrimage; and as I was scrambling about on one side of a roaring mountain torrent, caught sight of a red bear feeding high up on the edge of a thick wood on the other. I was soon across the stream and clambering up the far side, which was horribly steep and crumbly; but before I was half-way up the bear had retired into the seclusion of the thick undergrowth, which covered the ground with almost tropical luxuriance, where it was about as much use looking for him as for a needle in a bundle of hay.

The next morning I was up early in the hopes of finding him feeding in the open, but without success; and getting back to camp before midday, I marched on

nine miles to Sonamerg. From here I went on the next day, passing through the magnificent gorge of the same name, and leaving the small village of Rezam, where I had spent a night in March, behind, camped at the foot of a nullah which runs up from the village of Kolun.

Here I saw nothing in spite of getting up by moonlight and reaching likely ground for bears by break of day, so on October 2nd I crossed the ridge which divided

Kashmir in autumn.

the Kolun nullah from the next nullah on the south, which takes its name from the village of Rewill at its mouth. The same evening, accompanied by a villager, I was making my way through the dense woods which covered the nullah sides when our attention was attracted by a sound of crunching in front of us. This turned out to be a black bear at his favourite amusement of cracking walnuts. The jungle was so thick that

for some time we were unable to locate him, but crept stealthily on towards the sound whenever it was audible. Suddenly I caught sight of a black object in the undergrowth, but as it immediately vanished again, I kept quite still and waited. The crunching noise continued, and in a few minutes I saw him again. It was very dark, the sun having set some time before, and the sights were scarcely visible; but taking the best aim

Sonamerg.

I could, I fired, causing the bear to come tumbling down the hillside with a howl. Before he reached the bottom of the small nullah in which we were, however, he seemed to recover himself, and was soon making off in the dark. We followed for a short distance, but it was too late to do any good, and we had to give up and return to camp without him.

The blood on his track, which we picked up again

early the next morning, showed that he was hard hit, and we followed the trail through dense jungle of thorn-bush and other undergrowth till it brought us to the main stream of the nullah. Here we were delayed for a considerable time, as he had crossed the stream, and the water had evidently closed up the wound for the time being, as no blood was to be seen on the far side to help us to pick up the trail. We did eventually light on his tracks again, and followed them for a very long way over very bad ground till we at last lost them altogether, and were obliged to make up our minds that he had got away.

My small experience of black bears showed me that they are exceedingly tough customers, and that unless hit in a vital spot they are little likely to be bagged, at anyrate with a small rifle; and as the only time one is likely to come across them is either late in the evening or very early in the morning, when the light is far from good, one's chance of bagging them seems to depend more on luck than anything else.

As there was no particular reason why I should hurry, I remained camped where I was for a few days, wandering among the nullahs near by in search of game. After the hard work and hideous monotony of life and travel in the barren uplands of Tibet, the pleasant days among the beautiful wooded glades and luxuriant vegetation of the Sind were quite delightful. Generally we would leave camp shortly before dawn, when the crisp invigorating air of early morning filled one's whole being, making one want to jump and shout for pure joy at being alive, and climb some wooded nullah on the chance of coming across a stag or bear, to return to a late breakfast and long and peaceful midday rest till evening, when we would be off again for another ramble before dark.

One day I took food and blankets, and ascended the forest-clad mountains on the east side of the valley. Towards evening I heard a curious shrill whistle, the challenge of the barasingh stag, and tried hard to stalk him by the sound; but the forest was so thick that we could not see more than a few yards ahead, and the first proof we had that we were near game was the hoarse barking of the hinds. This was the signal for a stampede of the deer, and though we could not have been more than 50 or 60 yards from them, I never saw the stag at all, the only thing that was visible being the hind-quarters of a hind as she vanished among the trees. In the still dry air the crackling of dead leaves underfoot, or the snapping of a twig, can be heard at immense distances, and hunting barasingh, who keep almost entirely to the forest, only emerging into more or less open spots to feed in the early mornings and late evenings, is carried on with the greatest difficulty.

Night had now come, and having cooked my dinner over a fire of fir-cones and pinewood, I lay down beneath some giant firs and watched the strange shadows cast by the flickering light of the fire among the gnarled trunks of the forest till they became dim and hazy, and finally vanished as unconsciousness stole over me.

As soon as signs of approaching dawn made themselves apparent I roused myself, and having cooked and eaten breakfast, started off in search of game. By the time the sun was high in the heavens we got back to the scene of our bivouac, having seen nothing, and I passed the heat of the day in idleness, or in other words I slept soundly till the afternoon, when I sent blankets and cooking-pots back to camp, and again wandered off through the mighty forests of the moun-

tains; but got back to camp in the valley by dark without so much as having seen a single beast.

My next camp on my way down the Sind was at a small village called Haroo, where "hope which springs eternal" was excited by the sight of three bears, which we were just in time to see disappearing in a small nullah full of walnut-trees, high up above the village. It was too late to think of doing anything before morning, so having made a note of the place, I returned to camp and instructed Ram Pershad to wake me an hour or so before dawn.

There appeared to be some difference of opinion as to whether the desired hour had arrived or not, for after having been asleep for what struck me as being an infinitesimally short space of time, I was waked up by the sound of a heated argument in progress between Khada Bux and the Hindu, the former maintaining that the night was yet young, while the latter was of the opinion that day was at hand. All the watches we had among us had struck work some time ago in Ladak, and stubbornly refused to go on again, so that the determination of time had been left to more natural means. The result of this, coupled with the fact that on this occasion there happened to be no moon, and that Ram Pershad was not overburdened with a knowledge of astronomy, was that I was unceremoniously hurried out of bed and informed, with the practised assurance of the Oriental, that it wanted precisely one hour to daylight; and though hardly as confident as my servant, I swallowed a cup of tea and started the ascent by the light of a lantern. We climbed steadily up the steep hillside, pausing ever and anon for breath, till at length we reached the patch of trees into which the bears had been seen to go, where we sat down and patiently awaited daylight. This took so long to come that my

men gave it up as a bad job and went to sleep, and I was beginning to wonder vaguely if it might not still be somewhere about midnight, when I noticed that some of the less brilliant of the myriad stars overhead were beginning to pale, and knew that day was at hand.

I know of nothing better calculated to inspire the soul of man with the highest aspirations of which it is capable than to find oneself high up on some lofty isolated mountain, far removed from the humdrum medley of prosy humanity, an hour or so before dawn on a clear and starry night. Such a night, or rather morning, was this, the 10th of October, and in just such a position was I. An extraordinary stillness pervaded the air, filling one with that curious undefinable feeling of awe, almost invariably produced in one when gazing at the calm unmoved solemnity of the eternal mountains, which remained unbroken till the jagged edges of black rock which crowned the range opposite us grew distinct and sharply outlined against the brightening sky, looking black and hard in the half light with all the contrasts in light and shade of a pen-and-ink drawing, when a single note from a shrill-voiced bird broke the mysterious spell and the day was come.

I roused my sleeping followers, and we hurried into different positions to watch the thicket in which the bears had disappeared overnight. The sun had just risen when one of my men signalled that he saw the bears, who had emerged from the cover and were making their way up the mountain. Unfortunately they had chosen the very corner of the cover which was farthest away from me, to come out of, and were out of shot; and I had the mortification of watching them scrambling unconcernedly up the hill, through the telescope, evidently entirely ignorant of the danger which they had so

narrowly escaped. Having watched them out of sight, I returned to camp and breakfast, and the luxury of a siesta during the middle of the day.

I tried my luck at bears once more before dark; but though I encountered one on my way home, bad luck pursued me, for in the twilight I hit him far back, and a long and tiring search for the wounded beast on the morrow ended disappointingly; for after having tracked him for some hours, expecting every moment to come upon his corpse, from the amount of blood which covered the ground, we finally lost the trail and had to give it up.

Rather tired of black bears and their ways, I made a variation in the usual early morning and evening scramble, by taking food and blankets to the summit of the range on the east side of the valley, above the village of Yechahan, on the chance of finding a serow. I also sent off Subhana with a letter to the maharajah at Srinagar, enclosing a letter of introduction, and asking leave to try my luck after barasingh in certain nullahs rising above the villages of Kachnambal and Chittingool, reserved by his Highness as a preserve.

My search of the heights above Yechahan was unproductive, and after one night on the summit I returned to the valley to pass the time before I could get an answer from Srinagar as best I could. One day I organised a bear-drive, but found no bear at home; and one evening I had a wild run after a barasingh which a breathless villager brought news of. I was so far successful as to catch sight of the beast myself standing half hidden by a tree; but a shot in the twilight struck him, alas! far back, and only resulted in a hard chase that night and the next morning, with no reward at the end. At last on the morning of the 20th Subhana returned from Srinagar with post and a

pass from the maharajah giving me permission to shoot in his preserve; and having collected coolies we set out, and pitched camp in the afternoon on the banks of a stream which flowed through the centre of the ground I wished to shoot over.

Having engaged a man from the nearest village who had the reputation of knowing the ground and the most likely haunts of the deer, we climbed the mountain on the northern side of camp on the 21st, taking food and bedding with us. While passing through a thickly wooded nullah in the mountain-side we suddenly came upon a large black bear; but I had most unfortunately omitted to load the rifles, and before I could ram a cartridge in he was off and out of sight. Later on, as we were sitting on the summit of the ridge spying the ground before dark, three more bears made their appearance about half a mile off; but an attempt to cut them off was unsuccessful, and choosing a sheltered nook we spread out our blankets for the night. I contented myself with cold food in order not to have to light a fire, which might disturb any game there might happen to be in the immediate neighbourhood.

On waking in the morning I found everything covered with a thick white layer of hoar-frost, and it was uncommon cold work waiting for a chance at the bears before sunrise. No bears put in an appearance, and after watching the lovely effects of the sunrise on the glistening white mountains, I made my way to a small stream of water, to which it was likely that any game there might be would come to drink, for water at this time of year is scarce on the mountain-side. As I was sitting watching a pine-martin came gambolling towards the water. I looked on at his antics as he played about round the pool, unwilling to shoot for fear of disturbing

larger game; but by dark nothing else had come, and I made my way to my blankets, which had been taken farther down the hill. In the morning I took a turn in the direction of camp, which I reached without coming across anything in the shape of game.

So far, since coming to the preserve, I had not seen so much as a sign of a stag; but there still remained the mountains on the southern side of the nullah, and I left camp on the 24th, accompanied by coolies carrying blankets and a plentiful supply of cold food, with the intention of giving the remaining ground a thoroughly good trial before returning to Srinagar. Three days and nights did I spend on the mountains away from camp, sleeping where I was at the end of the day, and living on cold food for fear of disturbing game by lighting a fire, though on one occasion I did go so far as to make a small fire, sufficient to boil water for a cup of tea, after I had searched the whole hillside round without success. Once I was very near securing a fine head. It was the day after I had left camp, that Saltana, the local shikarie, and myself, having crawled out of our blankets in the faint grey light of approaching day,—it was very chilly work on these mountain-tops,—became aware of a shadowy form moving slowly across a narrow glade in the forest above us. We pulled up short and stood motionless, while the stag—for sure enough a fine barasingh stag it was—halted a moment on the edge of the opening, tearing at a tree-trunk and tossing his fine massive head in the pride of his strength, and then moved slowly on, to pass from view hidden among the giant fir-trees of the forest.

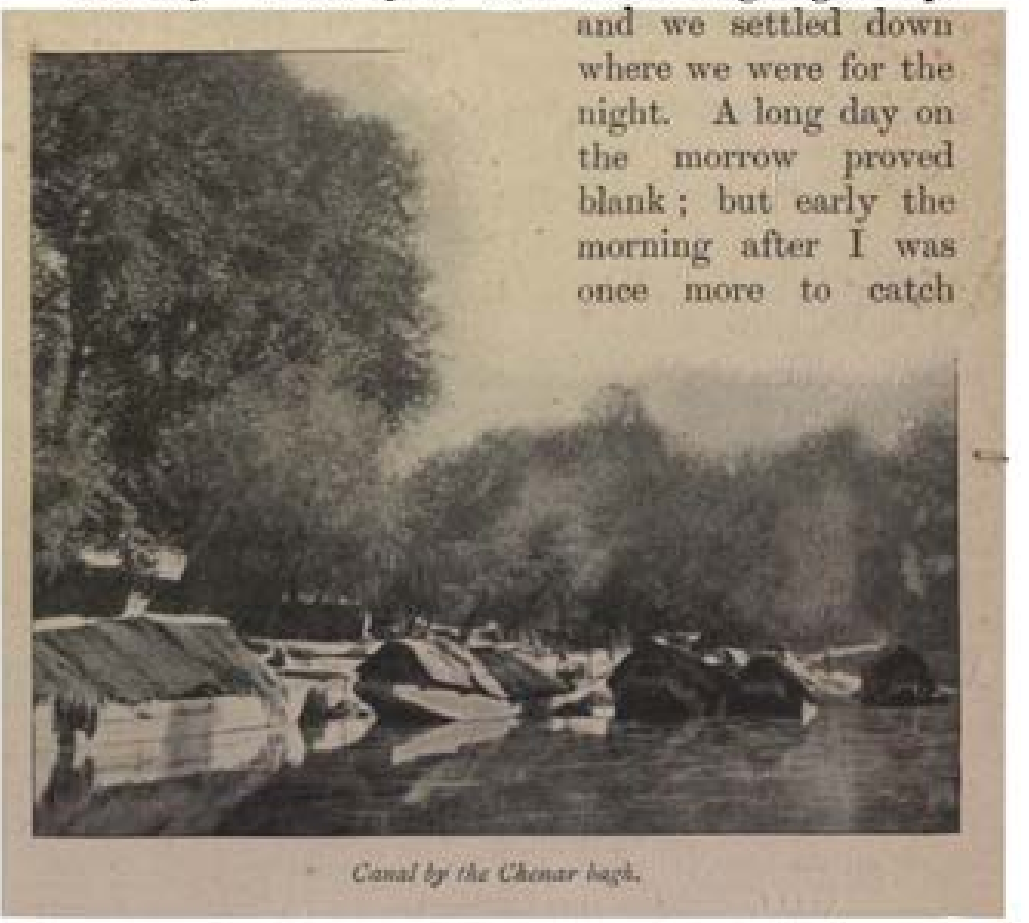
Was the chain of bad luck at last to be broken? A short whispered consultation was enough to determine what was to be done, and with every sense acutely alert we hurried silently through the trees, with nerves

and muscles strained as we picked each step to avoid the fatal snap of dry twigs and fallen branches, till we found ourselves in the open above the wood, a few hundred yards above the spot where the stag had last been seen. Making our way from here across the mountain-side in a direction parallel to that pursued by the object of our chase, we again entered the wood when we judged that we should be a short distance ahead of the stag, and picked our way with redoubled care straight down the mountain to cut him off. But alas for all our care! we were no match for the natural instinct of danger of which wild animals to a greater or less degree invariably seem to be possessed. A sudden crashing of the undergrowth was the first intimation which we had of the near proximity of our game, followed by a quick vision of a moving beast. I ran as I have never run before, and catching sight of the flying stag among the trees, snapped off the rifle at his tail. On reaching the spot it was apparent that he had been hit, for the ground was covered with blood.

Any one who has spent hours crawling after a fine stag in the Highlands of Scotland, and succeeded at last in getting within shot, only to see, when the smoke clears off, a wounded beast disappearing from view, will realise to a certain extent my mingled feelings of hope, despair, and anxiety as I gazed on the few red smudges on the leaves and grass, the net result of many days' hard work. For long we followed the trail, hope being raised high from time to time by larger patches of gore where the wounded beast had evidently stopped to rest; but after a time the trail became more and more difficult to follow, and at length we lost it altogether and were forced to confess to ourselves that we were beaten. At the best it is but a sorry thing to lose a wounded beast, and it was poor

consolation to me to think that his days were numbered and that the chance of his surviving was small, seeing that the chance of my ever becoming the possessor of the magnificent pair of antlers that surmounted his noble brow was, to say the least of it, infinitely smaller.

The day was far spent when we at length gave up, and we settled down where we were for the night. A long day on the morrow proved blank; but early the morning after I was once more to catch



Canal by the Chenar bagh.

sight of a stag. The wind was the culprit on this occasion, which spoilt our stalk and sent the beast flying as if all the devils in hell were after him. This was the last straw, for my patience had reached its extreme limit; and finding that it was still early, I rested a short time while I ate some breakfast, and then took a bee-line for camp. Arrived there, I

roused up the men, who had had a thoroughly lazy time while I had been toiling in the mountains, struck the tents, and ordered camp down the Sind to Gunderbal. I made a detour myself to visit the vineyards near Manasbal, where I purchased some small white grapes for a few pence, finally reaching camp, which I found pitched under the spreading branches of a huge chenar-tree near Gunderbal, just before dark. A day's march brought me from Gunderbal to the capital, and the pleasant surroundings of the "chenar bagh," or garden of chenar-trees, recognised as the bachelors' camping-ground.

CHAPTER X.

SRINAGAR TO BOONJI.

Civilisation once more—A wash and brush up—The Residency—Kashmir merchants—A deer-drive—Preparations for a fresh start—Meteors—Down the Jelum—A *doonga*—Leisurely habits of the Kashmiri boatman—Bandipur—Tragbal—Across the Raj Diangan—Goorais—Saltana falls ill—Pushwari—Frontier chiefs—Across the Boorzil Pass—Chillum Chauki—Astor—The Hattoo Pir—Ramghat—Boonji—"The Pig and Whistle"—Country round Boonji—Ramzan, shikaris—In search of markhor—Acrobatic climbing feat—An unsuccessful stalk.

To find oneself once more among one's fellow-beings, surrounded by the conveniences and luxuries of civilised life, after an absence of some duration from them, is to experience a feeling of very distinct pleasure; and having lived a solitary existence in the wilds of the mountains for a period of eight months, during the whole of which time I had been a sojourner in strange lands, it was with feelings of complete satisfaction that I viewed the prospect of a few days' rest from the wear and tear of a wandering life, among the pleasant surroundings of the capital and in the cheerful society of the small permanent European population.

I found a good deal of grooming necessary before I was fit to be seen in public, and the voluble native barber whose services I requisitioned found a good hour's work before him ere the overgrown locks of

a head of, at the best, unruly hair were reduced to something like order, and a razor had performed an office which for eight months had been entirely neglected. This done, a tub and a suit of clothes left behind in Srinagar, with other articles superfluous beyond the limits of civilised existence, to replace the tattered rags which were all that was left of my modest wardrobe, restored my appearance to that of the ordinary product of civilisation, and I sallied forth to meet my friends.

The temporary population which yearly floods the valley in the summer months had fled, leaving behind the few whose duty or business keeps them there throughout the year, and the first person that I came across was Mitchell, whose advice and kind assistance had gone so far to make my trip the successful one it had been. Trench was also in the capital, though in a different capacity now, his duties being to take charge of Ayub Khan; and at the Residency was Sir A. Talbot, whose acquaintance I had not previously made, and who very kindly invited me to stay with him as long as I remained in Srinagar. I accepted his hospitality with pleasure, for a permanent abode, snow-white tablecloths at meals, silver spoons and forks, linen sheets, and a host of other trifles, are things not to be sniffed at by any one who is a stranger to them; and last, but not least, fellow-beings to talk to was an attraction which I at least was not inclined to resist.

Very pleasant, indeed, were the days of rest and quiet, which were occupied in making preparations before I started off again. The native merchants, who had subsided into their customary state of winter apathy, woke up suddenly on discovering that a white stranger was in their midst, and swooped down greedily

upon their lawful prey. Many an hour did I while away, surrounded by an eager crowd, all tumbling over one another in their anxiety to be the first to fleece the pigeon. But the pigeon, taught of experience, was a failure as a prey, talked a good deal, laughed a good deal more, and parted with very little, so that the hawks at length fell off and retired once more to winter hibernation. I remember walking along the bund one day with Mitchell, when our attention was attracted by a crowd of jabbering Kashmiris, all hovering expectantly round a single house-boat. "What's up?" asked Mitchell of his chaprassie, who was following us. A broad grin spread over the man's face as he replied, "Naya sahib"—a new sahib. Such attentions on the part of these harpies are apt to become more than a nuisance to any one new to their ways, for mild remonstrance is of little use. Taken in the right way, however, they are harmless enough creatures; and where, after all, is the man who will not do a good deal if he can?

A few days after my arrival, the Resident, who was about to start for Khroo and Traal, preserves of the maharajah, with a view to organising a deer-drive, was kind enough to ask me to accompany him, and accordingly we set off together one afternoon to find a pleasant camp pitched for us at the foot of the mountains above the village of Khroo. We spent two or three days amid superb scenery, and took part in several drives. There was no lack of beaters, for the greater number of villagers in this district discharge their liabilities by beating whenever required to do so, instead of paying tribute to his Highness; but in spite of all our efforts no big game was bagged. I fancy the deer become pretty cunning, for on one occasion one of the beaters was charged and knocked down by a stag who refused

to go forward, preferring to break back through the line of beaters.

On my return I found plenty to occupy my time making preparations for my proposed expedition to Gilgit, to which part of the country I had been lucky enough to get leave to proceed. Snow had begun to fall on the mountains all round the "happy valley," and indeed lay quite low on the Pir Panjal to the south, which fact induced me to hurry on preparations with all speed.

The night before my departure I spent a pleasant evening, dining in company with several mutual friends, with Trench, after which we proposed sitting up to see the gigantic shower of meteors, predicted for that night with the greatest possible confidence by astronomers. It was, in fact, to be the heaviest shower of falling-stars which had occurred for something over thirty years, and during the day renewed assurances had reached us by wire from Simla of the display which we were about to witness. We certainly looked after our part of the performance, and sat up gazing at the absolutely untroubled heavens till 4 A.M., when we thought we were justified in going to bed. What became of the meteors I failed to discover; all I know is that they put in no appearance for us.

The next day my flying visit to the civilised world came to an end, and after dinner I bade farewell to my kind host and boarded the *doonga*, which under the charge of boatman Salia was to take me down the river to Bandipur, three days' march by road from Srinagar. Thus for the third time did I find myself being punted down the Jelum.

A *doonga*, the native equivalent of a house-boat, is by far the less pretentious, and consequently less cumbrous, of the two creations, and this, coupled with

the fact that I had engaged extra boatmen and that we had the stream with us the whole way, had given me grounds for hoping that I should reach Bandipur sufficiently early to admit of my getting through a march the same day. In this, however, I was doomed to disappointment; for in spite of all these advantages in our favour, the genius for loitering innate in the *mangi* of Kashmir succeeded in postponing our arrival till midday. Other delays here in getting ponies for transport made further progress for the day impossible, and I was constrained to stay where I was. On the outskirts of the village I found an old deserted bungalow, once the property of an officer, I believe, which I took possession of for the night, after making sure that everything was ready for a start on the morrow.

From Bandipur the path zigzagged up a steep mountain-side to the north, and as we reached the heights above the valley we saw great Haramook clear and sharp against the sky, his mighty peak clad with eternal snow, standing out bold and awe-inspiring amid a host of smaller satellites. I took a short cut straight up the mountain-side, while the baggage-ponies wound backwards and forwards across the mountain-face, and reached Tragbal hut, a log cabin situated in the midst of a magnificent pine-forest, early in the forenoon. I found information which I had received—to the effect that drinkable water was not to be had—correct, and had taken the precaution of bringing a few skinfuls from a spring someway down the mountain-side, which was sufficient for all our wants.

A sharp frost set in during the night, and day broke clear and fine. I got the baggage-ponies off at 7.30, and then continued the ascent of the mountains. At a

height of 11,900 feet I reached the summit of the Raj Diangan Pass, and was pleasantly surprised to find very little snow, not more than 6 inches or so at most, on the track. A high wind, however, blew over the tops, with biting cold, and offered very little inducement to keep one there, so that I hurried down the far side till I reached the *dāk* hut at Gurai at eleven o'clock, where I rested for an hour before going on

Traghal log hut.

again. From here the path took us along the foot of an elevated valley, having an average height of about 7000 feet, on each side of which rose magnificent forest-clad mountains, affording scenery of the most superb description. I reached Goorais at 5 P.M., having walked something over twenty-five miles during the day, and took up my quarters in the *dāk* hut. Here I waited in darkness till 8 P.M., when the baggage

turned up, for the chimney smoked so badly when I lighted a fire that I had to do without one.

The first thing I heard in the morning was that Saltana was ill, and on going to see what was the matter, found him groaning in the most awful manner. I entirely failed to diagnose his malady, and as after a stiff dose of brandy he seemed quite unable to move, I was obliged to leave him in charge of the *dāk chau-*

In the Gooruis valley.

kidar till he got better, when I told him he could either follow us or return home.

Twelve miles up the Boorzil stream took us to the *dāk* hut, Pushwari, where the temperature dropped to 20° Fahr., and I nearly got my fingers frozen off developing some photographs; and a similar distance the next day brought us to Boorzil Chauki, a hut at the foot of the Boorzil Pass. On the way I passed a com-

pany of frontier rajahs, including Gilgit, Hunza, Nagar, and Astor, on their way to India. As, with the exception of Nagar, none of them had ever been beyond the confines of their own wild lands, they were in a high state of excitement at the prospect of seeing all the wonders that lay before them.

I rose at 6 A.M. on the 20th, to a disgusting morning, dark and cold, and snow falling steadily. As I gradually ascended the pass and got higher and higher the snow became deeper, till by ten o'clock, when I reached the summit, it must have lain to a depth of 2 or 3 feet. A sombre grey mist, caused by fine falling snow, shrouded the whole surrounding, and this, combined with the deathly stillness and silence, and absolute absence of all life, produced a sense of indescribable dreariness and desolation. On the highest point of the pass stands a hut firmly built on a stout pedestal of stone to keep the floor above the level of the winter snows, and in it were one or two mail-runners awaiting the post-bag from Gilgit. Stern silent-looking men, and no wonder; for the life they lead, cut off from the haunts of men, battered by the storms, amid the wild mountains, through the raging winter, where the snow falls to a depth of 20 feet, carrying their lives in their hands, is hardly one to inspire merriment. After a quarter of an hour's rest I began the descent on the other side. It was of course much easier work than climbing up in the snow had been; but still the newly fallen snow on top of the old, which was frozen hard, made it very slippery and unpleasant, and I was glad enough when, after covering a distance of about eighteen miles in all, I reached Chillum Chauki, a post-hut similar to the one on the Kashmir side of the pass.

The next six days I spent on the road between

Chillum Chauki and Boonji, which led steadily down hill, at first between great rolling mountains sparsely covered with fir-trees and plentifully with snow, and then between great cliffs of naked rock bare and forbidding, till at length it debouched on to the lifeless tract of sand and gravel known as the Boonji plain.

At Goorikote, a tiny place a few miles north of Astor, I came upon a bungalow in process of building, the future abode of the engineer in charge of this section of the road, who was at this time in occupation of the *dāk* bungalow at Astor, at which place we spent a day together. Two marches from Astor brought me to the hut at Doian, and from here the path wound backwards and forwards across the face of a stupendous cliff, which rises sheer from the valley far below, forming one side of the famous Hattoo Pir gorge, a locality well known for the precipitous nature of the ground and the gloom and depression of the whole surrounding. It is a place where one inevitably becomes silent and depressed, and where at any moment, on looking over the edge of the path, one sees a drop of many hundred feet sheer down to the river far below. At the foot of the gorge we crossed the stream at a place called Ramghat, by a well-built bridge, which since the advent of the road has superseded the Shaitan Nara, or the Devil's bridge of old, whence we pursued our way along the Boonji plain till we reached the village of the same name.

Boonji—thanks to chance having placed it upon the one line over which, owing to the conformation of the country, the road between Kashmir and Gilgit must necessarily lie—rises superior to the ordinary village one comes across in the mountains, and boasts of a post and telegraph office as well as of a hospital and a bazaar. Furthermore, the exigencies of modern frontier

policy demand the presence of a company of Kashmir imperial service troops and a mountain battery, which in their turn require the services of two European officers as advisers, and it was Captain Johnson, who was quartered here in the capacity of adviser to the infantry, who welcomed me on my arrival, and insisted, with the genuine heartiness which experience teaches that one may invariably expect in distant corners of the empire, on my being his guest as long as it was convenient for me to remain in Boonji. Both he and Captain O'Connor, who held the same position towards the battery that Johnson did towards the infantry, were at this time in possession of the *dāk* bungalow familiarly known as "The Pig and Whistle," the house which was in process of construction for them having, I was given to understand, stopped short a little above the foundations for want of funds; but a spare room close by, belonging to the bungalow, was put at my disposal, and a running invitation accorded me to make myself at home and to come and go as I chose. The visitors' book at "The Pig and Whistle" is one of considerable interest, and consists of the names of various travellers who have from time to time found shelter beneath its hospitable roof inscribed on a smooth portion of the wall, among which, if I remember right, is the signature of the present Viceroy of India, when as Mr Curzon he passed through Boonji on his way to the Pamirs to determine the source of the Oxus.

The magnificent grandeur of the panorama which spreads itself out round Boonji is, I should think, absolutely unique. Here from a height of little more than 4000 feet one may look up and gaze in every direction upon a perfect succession of stupendous mountain-peaks, on whose naked sides vegetation is scarcely to be found, except where, in the corries and nullahs above the ap-

palling cliffs which run down to the valleys, patches of pine-forest are to be seen, for the most part far above the snow-line at this time of year. To the north rise clusters of giant peaks, many of them upwards of 20,000 feet in height, while to the south, away on the borders of Chilas, stands mighty Nanga Parbat,—why do we neglect its native title Deomir, the mountain of the gods?—towering to a height of nearly 27,000 feet, from the midst of a whole host of lesser heights.

I engaged a "Boota," as the inhabitants of these parts are called, Ramzan by name, to accompany me as shikarie, and a right good man he proved. I took a walk with him over the cliffs above the Boonji plain the first day, on the chance of finding a big oorial, and to see what the ground was like, after which I sent him up the Boonji nullah, a ravine of considerable length in the mountains immediately above the village, to see if there were any markhor to be seen, it being a little early for the old males to be with the does, the rutting season usually beginning about the second or third week in December.

However, he had only been away one day when he sent back a man to say that he had seen two males carrying fine horns, and at 6 A.M. on the last day of November I left Boonji with Khada Bux and the small *tente d'abri* to join him. We came across Ramzan by evening, and pitched the little tent in a hollow for the night. Here we left Khada Bux in charge of the tent next morning, and taking blankets and food for a couple of days, climbed on up the steep side of the nullah, till by afternoon we spied the markhor, who had shifted their ground, and were some way off. They were, in fact, on the cliffs on the far side of the nullah, and we were unable to get sufficiently near to stalk them by nightfall, but made our way down

nearly to the foot of the gorge with a view to stalking them first thing in the morning. We had some difficulty at first in finding a sufficiently level place to sleep on, and pulled up finally on a few square feet beneath a rock, where I spread out my blankets and was soon fast asleep.

At the first signs of daylight Ramzan was up and spying for the markhor, which he soon discovered on the same spot that we had last seen them on the evening before. Once safely out of their sight, we lost no time in setting about climbing the cliffs in front of us. Of all known animals that lure the sportsman on in their pursuit, surely none affect such truly appalling ground as do the spiral-horned markhor, a fact with which I had every opportunity of becoming familiarised during the course of the next few weeks; and before we had gone very far I found myself being pushed and pulled, by Ramzan and a villager from Boonji who was with us, across places which I should never have dreamt of attempting had I been by myself. We went through an acrobatic performance on one occasion which will always remain vividly impressed upon my memory. On future occasions I frequently found myself in similar positions, as any one who happens to be after markhor in this part of the world must necessarily do; but becoming as they did events of almost daily occurrence, they never made quite the same impression on me, and it is invariably this first exciting stalk that comes before my eye when I recall the days that I spent stalking markhor. We had reached a naked wall of rock in whose smooth surface scarcely a break was to be seen which might afford one foothold, rising up in front of us to a height of perhaps 15 or 16 feet, at an angle that can have been very little out of the perpendicular. On either side the way was barred by chasms

in the mountain-side, and I of course thought we should have to retrace our steps and try a fresh ascent. But not a bit of it! With the help of the villager and his own extraordinary powers of adhering to the most impossible-looking surfaces, Ramzan succeeded in getting to the top. The next moment I was hoisted on to the shoulders of the man below, whence, the whole of my body pressed tight against the rock, I was ordered to proceed by stepping on to the same individual's hand, which he held against the rock at arm's-length above his head. Ramzan, who was lying flat on top, then reached down and seized me by the wrist, and for the next few seconds I was literally hanging in mid-air, with a drop of goodness knows how far straight below me, till he succeeded in hauling me sufficiently far up to admit of my getting a grip on the ledge above myself. The villager, who was the last, and who must consequently have had the hardest job of all, was then got up, and we proceeded, the ground, as is almost invariably the case in these regions after one has got above the cliffs which run down to the valleys, getting less precipitous as we got higher.

Still there was a good deal of climbing yet before us, and it was not till one o'clock that we got up to within shooting distance of the herd. When we did, disappointment was in store; for the two big bucks which I had watched with such joyful feelings through the telescope were nowhere to be seen, and it only aggravated my feelings of irritation to see within easy shot, and quite unaware of any danger, the seven or eight small ones in whose company they had so recently been. A careful search over the whole mountain-side revealed nothing, for they had disappeared as completely as if the earth had opened and swallowed them up.

I wound up an unsatisfactory day in a highly unsatis-

factory manner; for as we were crossing a mountain-torrent on our way back to the rock under which we had left our food and blankets, a stone on to which I had jumped in the act of crossing became dislodged, and before I knew where I was I found myself up to the waist in icy water. Jolly! considering I had no change of clothes and nothing to look forward to except cold food and a night in the open. As soon as I awoke in the morning I hurried back to the hollow in which I had left Khada Bux and the small tent; for the provisions I had with me were exhausted, and after a meal and a rest made my way back to Boonji. Thus ended my first attempt to shoot a markhor.

CHAPTER XI.

IN PURSUIT OF MARKHOR.

Mountain-battery at work—Gold-washers—Off to Chilas—Futile stalk after oorial—Markhor shot—Varieties of markhor—Another buck shot Sparseness of population in Chilas—A chilly bivouac and death of third markhor—Up the Indus again—Markhor sighted—A long stalk with a successful termination—Christmas Day—50-inch markhor shot Simpleness of natives—Last markhor shot—Boonji again.

On getting back to "The Pig and Whistle" I found O'Connor just back from a day or two's shooting, and Johnson gone in search of a big markhor which his shikarie had seen in the Damot nullah. I had made up my mind that my next essay after these Brobdingnagian goats should be made among the steep cliffs and rugged gorges which run down on either side of the Indus, where it flows through the valley of Chilas, and with this idea sent Ramzan off to get hold of a Chilasi from the village of Gor to assist him in spying the ground in search of game, telling him that I should remain at Boonji till I received news from him.

While waiting here I was fortunate enough to see the mountain-battery at work. The ammunition and guns —7-pounders—were carried packed on the backs of mules, fine hardy-looking animals, who got over the stony ground on the banks of the Indus in first-rate style, which added to the smart and workmanlike ap-

pearance of the whole turn-out, consisting of about 150 Dogras. All words of command were given in English, and the rapidity with which they came into action was highly creditable, the actual time occupied between the word of command, "Action front," and the firing off of the first gun being only 42 seconds. During this time the guns had been dismounted from the mules, mounted for action, sighted, loaded, and fired. The destructive power of a 7-lb. shell on anything of a substantial nature is not very great, and after an examination of the targets and the ground on which they stood, I came to the conclusion that the moral effect, on an ignorant native enemy at any rate, would be a good deal greater than the actual. Nevertheless, in a country in which the manipulation of heavier guns is out of the question, the mountain-battery would undoubtedly be a very useful adjunct to a force.

I found another object of interest in the gold-washers, who spent the *livelong* day sifting the sand and gravel of the river-bed by the most primitive methods for gold. I stood patiently beside one of the little group of workers who indulge in this wearisome pursuit while he laboriously "washed" a few handfuls of sand till nothing remained but a microscopic speck of gold-dust, which he collected with the greatest care and tied up in an old bit of rag. I asked him how much gold a whole day's work would produce, and was told about 4 annas' worth.

At last, having heard news of markhor in the Gonar nullah, the stream of which flows into the Indus from the south, I bade farewell to my hosts at Boonji, and at 10.30 on the morning of the 10th started for Chilas on a pony of Johnson's. Eight miles over the Boonji plain brought me to Ramghat, where I left the Srinagar-Gilgit road, winding its way up the Hattoo Pir, on my left,

and following the course of the river, came at the end of another six miles to the storehouse of Leycher. Here I changed ponies and jogged along for another fourteen miles till I came to another commissariat depot, at the foot of the Jilliper nullah, and six miles farther reached camp, pitched on a level spot on the left bank of the river.

Ramzan and the Chilasi whom he had engaged as chota shikarie, Shah Beg by name, were still out looking for game on the right bank; but on the 12th Shah Beg came into camp, and after hearing that he had seen little worth troubling about on the ground that he had been over, I decided to move camp up the mouth of the Gonar nullah, and made a detour over some hills near by myself on the chance of coming across a big oorial. We encountered nothing worth a shot, and reached camp in the afternoon, pitched in a fine wild spot on the banks of the Gonar stream, sheltered beneath the beetling crags and towering heights of the nullah.

It was not until the 15th that I had my next stalk after a markhor. Ramzan had got in the day before, having seen a fine old buck far up in the mountains above the right bank of the river, and an oorial with a good head nearer at hand. Meanwhile Shah Beg had also caught sight of an old buck high up the Gonar nullah, so here was plenty to occupy us for the next few days. The oorial being close at hand, we went after him the same afternoon that Ramzan got back, but failed to bring off the stalk; and as we got back to camp by dark, I decided to go after the markhor which Shah Beg had seen the next day.

In the grey light of early morning we left camp and, accompanied by a Balti coolie carrying food and bedding, started on the ascent of the cliffs above us. The ceaseless climb up the everlasting cliffs and precipices which

stretched away in front of us would under ordinary circumstances have seemed long and wearisome, but now a keen expectation urged us on, and we wasted little time in halting on the way till we reached the fringe of the pine-forest where the markhor had last been seen. Here we took a pull and examined the ground all round very carefully with the telescope. Every cranny, hollow, and nullah that was in view was looked into, but not a sign of any living animal could we discover. At the end of half an hour Ramzan put down the glasses and began collecting wood and fir-cones, and soon had a fire burning under the shelter of a rock. The warmth was most acceptable, for we were on the edge of the snow-line, and for the last half hour we had been becoming numbed and chilled by an arctic wind, which made itself all the more felt from the state of heat we had got into in making the ascent. For some time he sat warming his feet and hands lost in thought, the result of his meditation being that he presently started off in one direction and the chota shikarie in another, leaving me where I was to pass the time the best way I could till they returned. For two hours I waited, at the end of which time the two men came back without having seen anything, and there was nothing to be done but make our way to some sheltered hollow in which to bivouac for the night.

I had just lit a fire and was beginning to make things comfortable when Shah Beg, who had strayed some way up the mountain-side above us, gave a low whistle, and in a very short time we were beside him. His attention had been caught by some sound, and though nothing was in sight he seemed pretty confident that markhor were somewhere not very far off. Close before us the mountain-slope fell away, giving place to steep precipitous cliffs,

which dropped sheer down to the bottom of a deep abyss, and dropping on to our hands and knees, we crawled cautiously towards the edge, screened by a mass of boulders and the stems of fir-trees, which grew in every hole and cranny in the rocks. Suddenly a doe walked slowly into sight, and we stopped motionless, not daring to move a muscle, pressed close against the ground. After what seemed an interminable time, but what was in reality only a few minutes, she disappeared again and we crawled on. We had scarcely advanced more than a few yards when we were constrained to sit tight once more by the sound of falling stones followed by the appearance of a small buck, who came scrambling hurriedly along and pulled up in full view not more than 30 yards from us. It was a moment of breathless excitement, during which I hugged the earth and did not so much as dare to wink. For several seconds he stood like a statue, then turned his head slowly and looked back over his shoulder. Only partly satisfied seemingly with what he saw, he half turned his head and directed his gaze to all appearances straight at us. The strain was becoming almost unbearable, when with another rapid glance over his shoulder he sprang forward and disappeared from view. Now came the explanation. Hard on his tracks came bounding a hoary old buck with long flowing beard and great spiral horns, which spread right over his shaggy back, as with a defiant toss of the head he halted almost in the identical spot which the young buck had just vacated. Talk of getting over stag-fever! It is easy enough when seated in a comfortable armchair to picture yourself unconcernedly drawing a bead on some monarch of the mountains. Ah yes, it is easy enough to be firm and unmoved in imagination; but when you are actually on those mountains, —on the brink of a precipice perhaps,—with the monarch

standing in all reality actually within 30 yards or so of you, and your heart palpitating with excitement till its throbs beat like blows against your chest, then it is a very different thing. I was trembling like a child as I lay flat on my face and wormed the rifle along to get it in front of me, and nearly did for my chance by starting a small stone rolling. Luckily he was too engrossed in his own concerns to notice, and as I drew a fine bead on a point just behind his shoulder all the feverish excitement, *mirabile dictu*, left me, and when I pressed the trigger it was with an absolutely steady hand. As the smoke blew back in my face I saw a hazy vision of an animal take one wild leap into the air, give one frantic struggle as he landed on the very edge

Head of markhor.

of the precipice, and then vanish as he tottered over into the abyss below.

Meanwhile a number of startled animals came into view, careering madly up the mountain-side, and sending showers of stones whizzing down like bullets; but they were of little account now, and the next ten minutes were occupied in scrambling down the side of the chasm by a route which was necessarily less direct than the one taken by the wounded markhor, till we came upon his corpse at the bottom. By great good luck his horns, though chipped and scratched, were not broken, and I had the satisfaction of bringing my first markhor head into camp that same evening; for since there was now no object in spending the night on the mountain, we made our way down as quick as we could, and after a scramble of two hours sighted the cheerful blaze of the camp fire.

Of the different varieties of markhor, two certainly are to be met with in these regions, usually known as the Astor and Kashmir varieties, the former easily recognisable by the wide spread and single twist of his horns, while the latter are more spiral, with two or three twists and a smaller span. I have also heard that an animal carrying horns more nearly approaching those of the Afghan variety exists in some of the nullahs not far from Gilgit; but this I cannot vouch for from personal experience. The usually accepted meaning of the word *markhor* is snake-eater, from the Persian, but I do not think it is by any means certain that this is the true derivation. Ramzan put the question into my head when he told me one day that he had just come across a huge snake while spying. I asked him if the markhor did not eat them, but he replied with a decided negative, and, as Colonel Heber Percy remarks, the name might

equally well be derived from the snakelike form of the horns.

My camp in the Gonar nullah was a very lucky one, for the next day, while I was superintending the cleaning of the horns and headskin, Shah Beg, who had gone up the nullah stream with Ramzan in the morning, came running into camp with news of a big markhor. I hurried off as soon as I had got into a pair of grass shoes, and, after a brisk walk of an hour, came upon Ramzan, who was keeping watch on the markhor. On climbing up some rocks I got the glass on to the buck. He was standing on a narrow ledge of rock with his head thrown back in bold defiance. A great shaggy beard hung down to his knees, while over his shoulders spread a massive pair of horns, giving him a truly majestic appearance.

I had not been watching him very long when he began moving down with the rest of the herd to the bottom of the nullah, which afforded us a fair chance of cutting him off. Away we went well hidden by a bend in the nullah-side till we were within about 200 yards of the herd, by now down in the nullah bottom, when an objectionable doe got wind of us and started the whole herd up the opposite bank. Luckily the ground was of a nature which even a markhor could only negotiate at a moderate pace, and after several rather wild shots the last cartridge in the magazine brought him crashing down till he was caught by a projecting rock. Ramzan made a dash across the nullah with the intention of *hallaling* him in the orthodox manner before life was quite extinct; but he was compelled to beat a retreat before a continuous shower of stones, which came pelting down from above as the frightened herd made good their escape, and the expression of helpless despair on his face, as he saw

the struggles of the expiring animal become gradually less, was almost pathetic, till relieved by a promise of a present of a goat should the buck prove to be quite dead before he got a chance of performing the necessary *hallal*.

He was a fine specimen of the Astor variety, with fine massive horns of just under 45 inches in length, in spite of broken tips, and though I afterwards killed markhor with horns of rather greater length, I do not think that any other specimen I obtained made a finer trophy, the thickness of his horns, their fine spread, and the length of his full grey beard combining to give him a magnificent wild appearance.

There was some difficulty in finding any one from whom a sheep or goat could be bought, the villages of the country, which can never have been anything but few and far between, having become further depopulated as a result of the risings of 1892 and 1893, which had ended in the occupation of Chilas by the Kashmir troops under British officers; and though the people were beginning to be aware of the benefits of a just and peaceful rule, and were coming back and settling in the country again as a consequence,—a fact which was shown by the small patches of cultivation which one came across from time to time,—yet the number of inhabitants was still very small, and one could go far without coming across a human being.

In the early morning of the 18th I struck camp, and leaving Ram Pershad with the greater part of the baggage on the Indus bank, crossed the river with one or two coolies carrying food and blankets and the *tente d'abri*. From here we made our way up into the mountains on the right bank of the river, and spent the night in the vicinity of a few deserted huts at the head of a nullah known as Am Ges.

I woke early in the morning, roused by the chilly winter air, to find clouds hanging low on the mountains and snow falling fitfully all round, an outlook which boded ill for our chance of sport. The day improved with age, however, and ere long we were wrestling with the cliffs that frowned above us, bent on finding the markhor that Ramzan had seen before I reached Chilas. Our search was no vain one either, for a careful survey with the telescope soon brought him to light, well occupied in keeping in order the herd of does over whom he exercised a somewhat masterful authority. An impossible precipice between us necessitated a long climb before we were able to get near him; but when we did we found him in capital stalking ground, and under cover of the many huge detached masses of rock which were strewed about the mountain-side we approached to within 60 or 70 yards of him, as he lay resting for a moment beneath one of the ilex-trees which seemed to thrive about here. The keen pleasure of watching him at so close a range was tempered by an equally keen anxiety as to his probable movements when he got up, and a question as to whether it would not be better to take him as he was lying beneath the tree rather than to wait till he got up, when he might not give a fair chance, kept forcing itself under my notice, in spite of knowledge gained by experience that a shot at a beast lying down is more likely to result in a miss than a hit. Luckily, while I was still debating as to what I should do he settled the question for me by getting up and planting his forefeet some way up the tree-trunk in order to get at a tempting young branch above. This gave me a splendid chance, and enabled me to place a bullet in his heart.

He had a pretty though not very large head of the

Kashmir variety, measuring 42½ inches along the outside curve of the horn, and it was the extra twists which distinguish this type, no doubt, that led Ramzan to suppose it was a much larger head than it turned out to be.

I slept at my bivouac of the night before, and on my way down the mountain to camp next day had an exciting stalk after a big oorial. He defeated us, however, and I added nothing more to my bag before reaching the Indus, where Ram Pershad was waiting for me with the baggage and main portion of the camp.

The next big markhor I saw was in the Jilliper nullah. At the foot of this nullah is a convenient storehouse and bungalow, which I made my headquarters while working the ground within reasonable distance of it.

The only light there was when I started on the ascent of the eternal mountains at five o'clock on the morning of the 22nd was afforded by the moon. We had a very long day on horribly steep ground, but were rewarded towards evening by the sight of a markhor with an exceptionally wide head making his way slowly down some cliffs opposite to us, evidently in search of water in the ravine bottom. We scrambled hurriedly down our side of the nullah, but when we reached the bottom we realised that it was too late to do anything further, and as Ramzan announced his intention of remaining where he was for the night, so as not to lose sight of the markhor, I made my way down to Jilliper with all speed under guidance of the coolie who was carrying my lunch. The next morning I was up early, and accompanied by a coolie with food and blankets, was on my way to the spot where Ramzan had spent the night by six o'clock. By eight

o'clock I reached him, and learned that he had seen the markhor still on the steep and rocky sides of the cliffs on the east of the *nullah*, so we at once started to try and stalk him, leaving our bedding in charge of the coolie. We had not gone very far before the clouds came down upon us in great heavy masses, and snow began falling thick and fast, shrouding everything so that we could only see a few yards in any direction. A little groping about brought to light an overhanging rock, in the shelter of which we ensconced ourselves, and having collected a few armfuls of wood, lit a fire and resigned ourselves to the inevitable. It always struck me as curious that markhor never seemed to associate fire with danger, and Ramzan never had the slightest hesitation in lighting a fire on the mountain-side even when within sight of them. He told me he had often watched markhor *for hours* while he kept up a good fire beside him, and I certainly did the same thing myself on more than one occasion with no untoward results. It is a great advantage to be aware of this, as watching game near the snow-line at this time of year is apt to be very chilly work.

For four hours we sat crouching beneath the shelter of our friendly rock while snow fell steadily, covering the hard dry ground with a thick white fall. About one o'clock the clouds began to lift, and we crawled out to reconnoitre. The markhor had evidently retreated downwards to avoid the snow, which is an abomination unto them, and it was some time before we again saw them far below us. A long and somewhat perilous descent down the cliff faces, rendered more formidable than ever by the layer of slippery treacherous snow, brought us to within a quarter of a mile of them; but beyond this we dared not go, for the wind was blowing in gusts and squalls from every direction. As the

weather did not improve we watched them till nearly dark, and then made our way back to the stream by which we had left our blankets. I was far too tired to embark on anything great in the way of culinary operations; but having brewed and despatched a good bowl of soup, gave way to slumber, whose importunities were of too pressing a nature to admit of their being long denied.

A little before six o'clock I awoke and got up. The sky was clearer, though heavy clouds still hung sullenly about on many of the tops. Ramzan was impatient, so I breakfasted off a cold fowl to save the time spent in cooking, and then started off with him in the direction of the spot where we had left the markhor in the evening. By ten o'clock we made him out, and soon discovered that he had been joined by another old buck, also carrying a fine pair of horns. Neither seemed to consider the presence of the other at all desirable, and as we watched them through the glass it seemed that a desperate fight must come off at any moment, when the whole herd suddenly started up the mountain, closely followed by the two bucks. There was no time to stop and ask as to the why and wherefore of this unexpected move on their part, for without losing a second Ramzan started off up the most appalling cliff, and I was constrained to follow him as best I could. For half an hour we scrambled and climbed as hard as we could, and just when I was beginning to think that I could not go another step I caught sight of the old bucks going slowly up the cliffs about 200 yards above us. I lay down, and taking a rest off a rock tried to draw a bead on the nearest of them. Shall I ever forget the next few seconds while I tried to get the rifle to point somewhere in the direction of the game? Every pulse in my body was throbbing as if it was going to burst, my

breath came in painful gasps, and my eyes were blinded with water from the biting wind and my recent killing exertion. Exactly what happened I do not know; all I know is that I emptied the magazine, just getting in six shots before the hindermost of the two beasts disappeared from sight.

Ramzan was smiling in a contented sort of way, and told me it was all right, and that we would go on as soon as I had got my breath. When we reached the place where he had gone out of sight we found a thick trail of blood, which we followed for a few hundred yards, when Ramzan stopped and took out his glass. High up above us he saw the other big buck, and nothing would satisfy him but that we should be off to try and circumvent him. For over an hour we toiled up the steep friable mountain-side, at the end of which time the buck was as far off as ever and still moving, so we had to give him up. We then climbed down to follow up the trail of the wounded animal, and before very long came suddenly upon him lying down within a dozen yards of us. I could only see his horns, and before I could get the rifle up he had disappeared. A moment later he came into sight again, and stood broadside about 200 yards off. I put up the 200-yards sight and took a steady shot, and was more than thankful to see him fall. He was a fine beast, with a magnificent wild horn of 46 inches. It was after three o'clock, so there was no time to be lost if I wished to reach Jilliper by evening, and we at once started on the descent. The long tiring tramp at the end of a hard day, which might have been so wearisome, seemed to me almost pleasant, so potent is the charm of success, and I reached the bungalow at Jilliper soon after dark with the impression that I had never spent so satisfactory a Christmas Eve before.

The remaining days of the old year passed off uneventfully. Khada Bux rose to the occasion and fed me up with all sorts of weird dishes on Christmas Day, though I am bound to say the only one that served to remind me of festivity and good cheer at home was a tinned plum-pudding which I had thoughtfully brought with me among my stores. Shortly afterwards a spell of very bad weather came on, and I gave Ramzan leave to go off with Shah Beg to the wedding of the latter's brother, which was taking place at the village of Gor. I had a snap-shot at a big oorial one day, but missed him; and when the snowstorm with its accompaniment of clouds and fog at length cleared off, nothing was to be seen of the big buck which we had been obliged to leave on Christmas Eve.

During the first few days in January I moved camp slowly up the left bank of the Indus, while I searched the nullahs and cliff faces which run down to the river; but it was not until the 5th when I reached Taleechy, a village some little way above the right bank on the borders of Chilas, that I heard of another big markhor.

Having secured the services of two villagers who said they knew of the whereabouts of a big beast, I started at daybreak on the 6th. My lucky star was in the ascendant, for before very long we spied him in a fairly good place for a stalk. We experienced no difficulty in approaching to within a few hundred yards, from which point there seemed to be every prospect of a flat crawl bringing me successfully within shot. I had wormed my way along the ground for some distance, when he suddenly appeared at the top of a ridge about 80 yards off. If he only stayed there for a moment I felt he must be mine; but he unfortunately did not, and moved on out of sight over the far side of the ridge without stopping. Slipping off the rope-soled

sandals I was wearing, I crept noiselessly on in my socks, and just as I reached the top of the ridge which he had crossed, caught sight of the tip of a horn immediately in front of me, not more than 6 yards off. I kept absolutely still with the rifle to my shoulder while the horn came slowly nearer and nearer. I hardly dared breathe, and at last it came so close that if I had stretched out my rifle I could actually have touched it, but such was the nature of the ground that nothing else was visible. At this critical moment a stone under my foot gave way and went crashing down a precipice, the horn vanishing simultaneously. I sprang on to the ridge to see the beast galloping at break-neck speed down the far side. I fired without result, and he vanished round a projecting rock. Running on over the most awful ground (with nothing but socks on my feet!), I reached the rock round which he had disappeared, and saw him labouring up an almost perpendicular cliff opposite us. I hit him with the 200-yards sight up; but he still went on until a shot from the mauser with the 300-yards sight up brought him down just as he reached the sky-line. When he did come down, it was with a terrible crash; but by great good luck he was brought to a standstill by a tree-root which was growing in a crevice in the rock before he had gone far enough to be much damaged. There was a great chasm between him and us, and it took some time to reach him; but when we did we found he was a real beauty, with horns of just 50 inches.

It was quite early, so while the men were skinning the dead beast I went on a little way to see if there was anything else in view. I did see another good markhor, but in quite impossible ground, so after watching him for a time on the chance of his moving, returned to see about getting the trophy to camp. When

I got back to the men I found them sitting round a fire laughing and chatting, while one of the Baltis was squatting over the blaze holding a huge hunk of the markhor's flesh in the flame spitted on a stick. The whole thing frequently caught fire, but this did not seem in any way to matter, and when according to his ideas it was sufficiently cooked they fell upon it as if they had not tasted food for a week. The smell of old markhor at this time of year is sufficient of itself to keep one at a fair distance, but when this savoury odour is enhanced by that of singed and burnt flesh it is absolutely nauseating, and how they could devour it as they did was always a mystery to me: there must be something radically different in the construction of their interior economy.

The few people who do inhabit these wild regions are simple to a degree, and their ideas as limited as the view to be had from the narrow steep ravines in which their homes are generally situated. I had a most amusing conversation one day with a villager who had accompanied me to the heights above Taleechy. We were sitting warming ourselves by a fire in a hollow while waiting for Ramzan, who was spying, to return, when the following conversation in broken Hindustani, mixed freely with words from various mountain dialects, took place:—

Villager. "When is his honour going back to his own village?"

"Very soon."

"How far is his honour's village from here?"

"A good long way—about 10,000 miles."

Gasp of astonishment followed by a prolonged silence, and then, "Are there many villages in his honour's country?"

"Yes, a good many—some thousands certainly."

Another gasp and prolonged silence. The next question was, "Are they all white men in his honour's country?"

"Yes, all white men."

"Then," with an air of triumph—for how could this be got over?—"who cooks his honour's food?"

"A white man," I said.

Phew! This was quite too much for him, and conversation came to an end. He could not imagine a white man demeaning himself with menial service when at home at his own village!

My next and last stalk after a markhor began on the 8th. Soon after daylight on that morning I was on the cliff faces where I had shot the 50-inch head, and soon made out a buck with a fine head. We had got to within about 500 or 600 yards of him, and were making a careful examination of the ground which still lay between the herd and us, when all of a sudden up went their heads, and they began moving rapidly off. I thought there must be something up to account for this behaviour, and the cause of it was soon apparent. Through the telescope I saw a magnificent snow-leopard creeping stealthily along after the herd. It was a fine sight to see him gliding over the rocks with his long furry tail trailing behind him, while every now and then he would pull up and take a look round. I would have given a good deal to have got a shot at him; but finding that the markhor were too wide awake to be trapped, he soon gave up his chase and disappeared from sight among a labyrinth of boulders.

For the rest of the day the markhor kept well out of harm's way, and it was not until the next day that they gave us a chance of continuing the stalk. We had a long spell over the most awful ground,—the cliff faces rising above the Boonji plain from Taleechy to Damot

are quite the worst anywhere, I believe,—and finally came up within shot of the big buck at two o'clock. He was walking slowly straight away from us; but I made up my mind that it was a case of now or never, and I fired just as he topped a ridge in front of him. When we reached the place where he had been when I fired there was no doubt that he had been hard hit, as evidenced by the gory state of the ground; but the ground on the other side of the ridge fell away sheer down for hundreds of feet, and there was not much doubt that he had pitched headlong down when he was struck. It was a terrible place; but Ramzan and Shah Beg said that they would get him if it was possible, and I started down with the Balti who carried my lunch. It was fearful work getting down, and we frequently had to retrace our steps when confronted by some absolutely insurmountable obstacle to find a more practicable route; but we did at length reach the Indus safely, and before we had got across were joined by Ramzan and Shah Beg carrying the markhor head with them. He had luckily lodged on a rock not very far down, and they had had comparatively little trouble in securing him. It was a fine wild horn, just over 46 inches in length. Once across the river I made tracks as hard as I could for Boonji, which I reached at seven o'clock, to be welcomed at "The Pig and Whistle" by Johnson.

Thus ended a most successful trip after markhor, the monarch *facile princeps* of all wild goats. The ground he habituates is in every way worthy of him, and there is no use whatsoever in thinking of embarking on a markhor-hunt if one is not prepared to take one's life in one's hand and, trusting to a good head and a tenacious pair of feet, to go boldly across ground that often would appear to afford foothold for nothing bigger than an insect. I have talked with various people who have

shot markhor in these regions, and one and all agree that there is no animal that would induce them to risk their lives on similar ground in the way that the markhor does. One friend of mine, a splendid climber and as

Rawzan and Shah Beg.

hardy an individual as one could meet with anywhere, told me that even he, accustomed as he was to the life, felt the effect on his nerves after a succession of days spent in pursuit of the markhor; but then he added,

"Who ever would go on to ground of that sort if there was not the temptation of a pair of magnificent horns in front of him to urge him on?"

The danger no doubt adds to the attraction of the sport, and when in addition to this you take into consideration the sublime grandeur of the scenery amid which it is carried out, the hard healthy life, the nights in the open with nothing between oneself and the glorious starlit heavens, in some hollow far up in the mysterious mountains, where nature speaks and stirs one's soul from slumber, to say nothing of the wild excitement which pulses through one's being as one surmounts one after another the obstacles which separate one from the object of one's pursuit, and the keen feeling of exhilaration which sweeps over one at a successful shot at the finish of some desperate stalk, I for one have not the slightest hesitation in saying that hunting markhor is a pastime which, if not unequalled, is at any rate unsurpassed by any other. But then perhaps I am prejudiced.

CHAPTER XII.

ACROSS THE HIMALAYAS IN MID-WINTER.

Preparations for leaving Boonji—Camp starts—Farewell to Johnson—Up the Hattoo Pir—Dashkin—Detained at Astor—Strange pets Fresh coolies from Astor—Their rate of hire—Godhai—Chillum Chauki—Crossing the Boorzil—Cold—A change for the worse in the weather—A hard march—A terrible night—The coolies *safe*—A post-runner lost—Snowed up—Off again—Gurai—A coolie spends a night in the snow—Across the Raj Diangan—From Tragbal to the Woolar Lake—Srinagar and civilisation once more—Back to India.

My object in visiting these regions being now achieved, I had leisure to consider my position and decide upon what was best to be done. I had lately received news which, for private reasons, made it expedient that I should return to civilisation at an early date; but a journey at this time of year across the huge barriers of mountains, whose snow-bound passes loomed in grim defiance between me and the outer world beyond, involved difficulties and hardships so great that I might well pause and consider before definitely deciding upon undertaking such a venture.

When after serious consideration I did make up my mind to attempt the journey, I found a good deal to occupy my attention before starting, in making all the arrangements possible, and made all the use of the advantages offered by Boonji as a base. Among these the presence of a *tesildah* or native official was by no

means the least, and I found him most useful in assisting me to collect coolies for transport. The whole of one morning was devoted to overhauling the baggage and dispensing with as much of it as was possible, for I foresaw that one of my chief difficulties would be likely to arise in connection with transport arrangements. Winter had set in in earnest, with its usual complement of driving snowstorms, biting frosts, and crushing avalanches; and vague rumours of the hardships suffered by those who ventured across the lonely passes of the mountains, of frost-bite, and even of the death from exhaustion and exposure of certain natives who had recently essayed a journey across the mountains, were afloat and obtrusively prominent whenever I broached the subject of transport among the natives. Such rumours were doubtless exaggerated with a view to increasing the rate of hire; but that they were to a certain extent well grounded was obvious when a sorry-looking individual approached me to beg for alms, and showed me in the place of hands a wretched withered stump, the result, he assured me, of frost-bite.

Luckily there was no necessity to take tents, there being huts at intervals the whole way; and having discarded all impediments of the kind that I had with me, in addition to all superfluous ammunition and stores, I collected what remained and arranged it into very light loads, to find that I should require at the least eighteen coolies. This may seem a large number to take all that one requires when travelling light; but it must be remembered that though 50 lb. or 60 lb. is an average load for a coolie under ordinary conditions, he can hardly be expected to carry more than 30 lb. or 40 lb. when wading through deep dry snow, if you hope to see him at the end of the day's march;

and besides food for the whole party, the horns required three men, the rifles and guns two more, leaving only thirteen for everything else, including stores, bedding, and the small amount of camp furniture I allowed myself.

When everything was ready plenty of coolies were found willing to go from Boonji, especially when they realised that they were only expected to accompany me as far as Astor, a village a few marches distant, where I was to obtain fresh transport. Among them were three Kashmiris, who had brought grass rope for making the sandal usually worn by the sportsman in the Himalayas, from the fertile valley of Kashmir, earlier in the season, and were only too glad of the opportunity thus afforded of returning to their homes by volunteering to accompany me and carry loads the whole way. This was satisfactory, and on the 12th of January I started them off in charge of Ram Pershad—of whose excellence as a camp servant I cannot speak too highly—while I remained to spend a last evening with my friends of the Boonji bungalow, and to enjoy once more, before leaving them behind, the many little trifles which go to make life comfortable,—well-cooked food, pleasant company, an easy-chair, dry clothes, a warm room, and a score of others, insignificant in themselves, perhaps, and accepted as a matter of course in the ordinary routine of everyday life, but of sufficient importance to make their absence felt and their presence appreciated by any one who may chance to have been in the often unpleasant position of having to do without them.

It was, consequently, the 13th of January when I bade farewell to my kind hosts and shook hands for the last time with Johnson. Poor fellow, it was but a short time after that he met with a violent death, claimed by

a fate as pitiless as the grim mountains on which he met it, for experienced and intrepid mountaineer though he was, he was doomed to lose his life while indulging in the sport he loved so well. A leap on to a treacherous rock as he hurried down to examine a fallen beast dislodged it from the mountain-side, causing him to lose his balance, and those who lose it here are like to lose it for all eternity. With his death all who knew him lost a true friend whose memory will ever stay with them to keep alive pangs of keenest sorrow at his premature demise.

After leaving the barren sandy valley of the Indus I began the ascent of the mountain-chain before me. In front Nanga Parbat (26,620 feet) frowned down like a giant sentinel on the surrounding country; behind, as far as the eye could see, rose tier upon tier of stupendous mountain-peaks, standing out on the eaves of the "roof of the world," great Haramosh (24,270 feet), Deobunni (20,154 feet), and Rakapooshi (25,550 feet). My way lay up the valley of the Astor river; but for several miles after leaving the junction of the Astor and the Indus the winding mountain path zigzagged backwards and forwards up the precipitous sides of the Hatto Pir till the river appeared but a tiny thread of silver below me.

I was able to ride this first day's journey along the narrow mountain path overhanging sheer precipices of many hundred feet, and by evening reached the small village of Dashkin, a distance of about thirty miles, and caught up the coolies with my baggage, whom I had started off the day before. Henceforth it would be a case of walking, or rather of wading, through interminable stretches of deep powdery snow, in which no sign of road or pathway would be visible beyond the tracks of the hardy post-runners, who for political reasons are

employed in keeping up communication as regularly as possible with our distant frontier outposts.

The morning of the 14th broke cold and stormy, and I had not gone far before it came on to snow, great masses of cloud rolling down the mountains and obscuring everything from view with a grey pall of damp chilling fog. The village of Astor—the largest village in these parts—was only fourteen miles distant, and I had no difficulty in reaching it soon after midday, the coolies turning up by evening. All that night and most of the next day snow fell with persistent monotony, and I was obliged to remain where I was, with no better occupation to distract my thoughts from pondering on the probable state of the passes ahead than watching the great fleecy snowflakes fall softly but with steady persistence to earth.

Still, I was better off than I might have been, for the hut here had been for some time in occupation by the European engineer in charge of the road to Gilgit, whose duties necessitated his living in the district; and though he himself was away at the time, I found the pleasing difference that exists between a furnished abode that has recently been lived in and an unfurnished one that has not, and made the most of such comfort as was to be derived from my surroundings.

I had made myself quite at home, and was sitting comfortably in a capacious armchair in front of a cheerful blaze, when I was startled out of a reverie by a fearful bang at the door, which promptly opened inwards to admit a most unlooked-for form of disturbance in the shape of two wild-looking wolves, who tore round the room, much to my perturbation, in an apparent state of frenzy, leaping on to the bed and knocking over the furniture, till reduced to a more tranquil state by the appearance in the door-way of an individual who per-

formed the offices of cook, and was left in charge when his master was away. He apologised for having neglected to tie up his charges, and expressed a hope that I had been in no way inconvenienced by their somewhat unceremonious entry, assuring me at the same time that they were perfectly quiet and gentlemanly behaved creatures. The description struck me as being just a little tame, especially when a short time afterwards I observed the rabid and unfeeling way in which they tore up and devoured certain portions of raw meat which constituted their daily feed, and wondered if the day might not come when they might so far forget themselves as to tear up in like manner things other than they were meant to. Truly solitude induces one to make strange companions, but I felt that I would put up with a long spell of solitude before I took to wolves as household pets. Dogs are excellent company; cats, and even bears, one might become much attached to; but wolves! Well, there is no accounting for tastes.

The 16th showed an improvement, and in the morning the headman of the district, who had been warned of my probable arrival from Boonji, came round and informed me that he had collected coolies who would accompany me as far as Goorais, the next village of any appreciable size, and assured me that he had picked his men and chosen as strong and hardy a lot as was available. This I had made a great point of, as carrying loads over snow, especially at great altitudes, is very far from child's play; and though life in this part of the world may be cheap (as one might be led to suppose from the tale of the old woman's fond relations, who after due deliberation approached the unfortunate sportsman who had accidentally shot her and gravely informed him that they were decided that

her value was 4 annas!—so at least runs the story), yet I had no wish to have any one's death on my hands, if by any reasonable precaution I could possibly avoid it.

When I had seen the men and started them loading up, I dismissed the coolies from Boonji—Baltis for the most part from the borders of Baltistan—and prepared to start on the next march. I left the matter of pay to be decided by the *tesildah* of Astor, who proposed to the men before they started that they should receive 6 annas—equivalent to 6d.—per man for the first march, which was an easy one, and double that sum for the succeeding marches, an arrangement which they willingly agreed to. The ordinary pay for an average day's march in most parts of the Himalayas is 4 annas (4d.) per coolie; but in the Gilgit agency, which is barren and destitute to a degree, food is a serious consideration, and 6 annas a-day is the recognised tariff, 2 annas of which is deducted if the hirer supplies his men with food. This he is practically bound to do, as when away from his home in these barren districts there is no place where the native can obtain it for himself, and an order has to be procured from the political agent at Gilgit for permission to buy flour from the various Government storehouses which are kept at intervals along the road through the agency, and which are supplied by a continual transport service through the short summer when the passes are open, from the abundant crops of the Kashmir valley. The necessity of preventing the stores from being depleted is obvious, and is one of the chief reasons why the country is closed to travellers and sportsmen, who are bound to have with them a considerable following of servants and coolies, all of whom require to be fed.

At the end of the day's march we halted at a hut

known as Godhai, about sixteen miles distant, and here spent the night. The height of Astor, which I had left in the morning, is about 7800 feet, or a rise of, roughly speaking, 4000 feet from the Indus, where I had left it, and in front loomed the dreaded Boorzil Pass, with an ascent of close on another 6000 feet. From autumn well on into June this pass is closed by snow, and the storms that sweep down on it during the winter carry all before them with an overwhelming fury.

The next morning, as no snow was actually falling, we continued our march; but the mountains all round were lost in mist, and the appearance of the sky was far from promising. As we went on along a gradual ascent the snow under foot became deeper, till by the time we reached Chillum Chauki, the hut near the foot of the Boorzil Pass, and our shelter for the night, it lay with an average depth of several feet. The distance of the march was supposed to be about sixteen miles, and I reached the hut about three o'clock; but hour after hour went by with no sign of any coolies with the baggage. At 7.30 Ram Pershad turned up, saying that the coolies made very slow progress through the snow, and were still a long way off, which was anything but comforting, as it was intensely cold and we had no food. About 10.30 a coolie, who had come on ahead of the rest, arrived with a portion of a sheep and some eggs, and Ram Pershad having managed, as only a child of the desert knows how, to cook them without apparatus of any kind, I dined! Soon after one or two more coolies struggled in, and at 11.15 a man with my bedding. I was not very long in getting into it, and immediately fell asleep. The rest of the coolies arrived about midnight. The cold during the night was severe, and all the more felt owing to its being very damp and

raw, the thermometer registering 26° of frost in an atmosphere that was heavy with cloud and fog.

At seven o'clock on the morning of the 18th I saw my coolies off, after dividing up the baggage so as to give every man a very light load, and then set off myself. As the sun rose in the heavens the clouds and fog dispersed, and before long we found ourselves tramping along over a huge stretch of dazzling whiteness, with lofty snow-bound peaks on either side of us, under an absolutely cloudless sky. By ten o'clock we reached the post-runner's hut of Sirdar Khoti, at the foot of the pass, and rested a few minutes before start-

My coolies marching through snow.

ing on the final ascent. As we left this small sign of human habitation behind us, and became lost in vast wastes of the wildest desolation, the dead silence, broken only by the laboured breathing of myself and my followers as we slowly forced our way through the deep dry snow, combined with the utter absence of life, filled one with a feeling akin to awe, and forced upon one the smallness and impotence of man amid the stupendous monuments of nature.

In spite of the sun the cold was intense, and every short halt proved how necessary were all the precautions we had taken against frost-bite. Between

one and two o'clock we reached the summit of the pass, and were all glad enough for a short rest in the uninhabited hut which stands upon the top. We could not afford to waste much time, however, for five miles still lay between us and the nearest post-runner's hut, and after a short breathing-space we began the descent, another two and a half hours' scrambling, falling, and

Hut on the summit of the Boorzil.

sliding bringing us to the post-runner's hut, Boorzil Chauki.

The relief on getting into the shade of a room after the fierce glare of the sun on the snow all day was immense; but the cold was very trying, and in spite of a huge wood-fire my thermometer rapidly sank to 8° Fahr. on the window-sill, the temperature in the room itself being only a few degrees higher. As the sun sank behind the mountains, and the stars began to twinkle and shine with extraordinary brilliance, the scene was one which could not fail to impress the most

prosaic of mortals. In the dry rarefied air everything stood out with wonderful sharpness of outline, and as the great orb of the full moon rose clear and stately, she seemed to look down in approval upon the cold frost-bound earth beneath her. The thermometer dropped rapidly to zero, but never registered more than 32° during the night, though the cold was probably much greater beyond the radius of the huge fire which I kept up, and in the morning when I started again at nine o'clock it was still freezing 28°. I experienced many trivial annoyances, both on this and on other occasions during the march, owing to the low temperature in the interior of the huts; for everything capable of freezing did so, and obstinately refused to be thawed. For several days I was unable to write in anything but pencil, for my ink, though the bottle was quite full, was reduced to a state of solidity, in which state it remained till I reached a warmer clime. It was also annoying to find, on taking up the milk-jug at breakfast, that it was covered with ice, which had to be melted whenever one wished to pour out some milk, for it had only to stand on the table for a few seconds to be reduced to the state of a solid again.

We were blessed with another fine day, and the march of fourteen miles to the next hut passed off uneventfully except for a fright we got shortly before the end of the day's march. We were walking across a steep snow-slide, cutting steps as we went, when there was a sudden sharp sound, resembling the noise made by ice cracking, only very much louder, and the Kashmiris with one accord took to their legs and fled. It was nothing much after all, but served to show how easily an avalanche may be started. For some reason or other the top layer of snow on the

steep snow-slide in front of us had given way, and a few cartloads had crashed down, leaving a ploughed-up patch in the otherwise unbroken surface. All the coolies got in in good time, and I began to congratulate myself on the successful way in which I was getting over my arduous journey; but the smooth course of events was destined to come to an abrupt termination, and before many hours were over the difficulties and hardships of the undertaking were brought home to me in a very realistic manner.

With a suddenness characteristic of the elements in these parts, the whole aspect of the heavens changed in an incredibly short time; and during the night the wind, which for the last two days had been conspicuous by its absence, blew a perfect hurricane. With the advent of dawn it died away, but had done its work; for in place of the clear blue sky, dense masses of ugly cloud rolled ominously over all the surrounding scene, and by the time we started at 9 A.M. snow was falling steadily, and so thickly that it was impossible to see more than a few yards in any direction. Under the circumstances, I strongly urged the advisability of staying where we were; but my guide maintained that we could reach the next hut, a distance of twelve miles, and concluding that he must know best, I gave way. Accompanied by him and another Kashmiri, I led the way, followed by the coolies with the baggage. The snow, which was every minute becoming deeper, was dry and powdery, and the going consequently most arduous. It is no doubt a very sound rule never to part from one's baggage, and before very long I had reason and leisure to ponder on the excellence of such a practice; but the coolies made wretchedly slow progress, and in a rash moment, and under pressure of a strong temptation to reach shelter and get out of the

swirling, blinding snow as soon as possible, I left them with an escort of a couple of local men to bring them along, and pressed on with the two Kashmiris.

On we went, silent and labouring, all our energy concentrated in getting one foot in front of the other, while the snow fell softly and caressingly to earth, shrouding everything in a thick white pall, till, for all I knew, we might have been going forwards, or backwards, or even round in a circle. For four long hours we forced our way onwards without a halt, except for an occasional stop to get our breath, till at last I insisted on a short rest to refresh ourselves with the cold food we had with us. Half an hour I allowed for this, and then on again. Slowly we forced our way through the deep treacherous snow, coming every now and then across avalanches newly fallen, which caused us to redouble our vigilance on dangerous places; while in striking illustration of that curious penchant which the brain seems to have in times of great physical exertion for asserting itself by a display of superabundant energy in calling to mind and keeping sight of odd trifles, I found myself mechanically repeating with distracting persistence a fragment of a long-forgotten lesson from school-day times, *Quod latus mundi nebulæ malusque Jupiter urget*, the appropriateness of which in no way compensated for the exasperating way in which it kept running through my head and refused to be banished.

At last, just as dark was falling, we staggered into the bare hut that was to afford us shelter for the night. Luckily we found a supply of firewood, and after some trouble, owing to the dampness of the wood and the want of draught up the chimney, I induced a fire to burn. This, however, proved to be a new source of discomfort, as the chimney absolutely refused to admit

of any smoke going up it, and in a very short time the room was filled with the choking pungent smoke peculiar to damp wood-fires. After this the only conditions on which I was able to have a fire were the window and door wide open, and even then it was hardly bearable. Outside a gale had sprung up, and with the snow, which never ceased falling, created a veritable blizzard. About 2 feet of fresh snow had fallen since morning, and the night promised to double it.

Having ransacked the hut, I found the furniture to consist of a couple of wooden chairs, a wooden table, and an old kerosene-oil tin. I luckily had some tea in my pocket, which I speedily turned to account by boiling it in the oil-tin (!), after having first reduced some snow to water, and, in spite of the flavour of smoke and oil, found it most comforting.

Night settled down with a darkness that could almost be felt, and as the hours passed by, and none of the coolies turned up, a terrible and sickening fear laid hold of me and refused to be shaken off; for well I knew the danger of the silent merciless avalanche. Only a few days before a European telegraph-signaller, accompanied by a party of seven or eight natives, who had been up to repair the telegraph line, which was suffering from one of the chronic winter interruptions to which it is liable, had been swept away without a warning, on a portion of the very ground which I had so lately traversed. An exclamation, a sudden cry, a blinding flash of dazzling whiteness, as the mountain-side gave way, sweeping down upon its victims, swift, silent, inexorable,—and all was over. A single individual a little apart from the rest, after being buried to the head on the extreme edge of the avalanche, was spared to tell the harrowing tale.

The fear of death is born in us, and he who can honestly say that he fears not death is more than human; yet to look death in the face, when circumstances force it before our vision, is to be moved by something besides our natural feelings of terror. In the realisation of the nearness of the angel of death, the distorted picture of life we are so accustomed to see by the light of our daily lives is suddenly straightened; the greater issues at stake assume their true proportion, and the trivialities to which we are wont to attach so much importance as too often to fill up the whole of the picture, for once fall back into proper focus, and we see things as they are. I well remember, and hope I shall never forget, the feelings with which I was filled as I stood on the ploughed-up mass of snow from which had but lately been dug the bodies of the victims of the avalanche, and in that moment knew that it was in greater hands than man's that the threads of our lives are held, and that, were our fate to be the same as that which had so lately overtaken others on this very spot, or were we to be guided safely to the end of our journey, an omniscient Providence ordereth all things for the best.

Yet as darkness, which seemed tangible, settled down upon the earth and cut me off from my men still battling with the elements, and still, for aught I knew, far from shelter, fear for them, far greater than any I had ever felt for myself, took hold of me, and, fight against it as I would, overwhelmed me with an anxiety that made the night the most terrible I have ever spent. By 10 P.M. I gave up all hope of seeing them, at any rate before morning, and took counsel with myself as to the best way of whiling away the weary hours till daylight. There was little enough choice when I came to consider it. Here I was in a cheerless

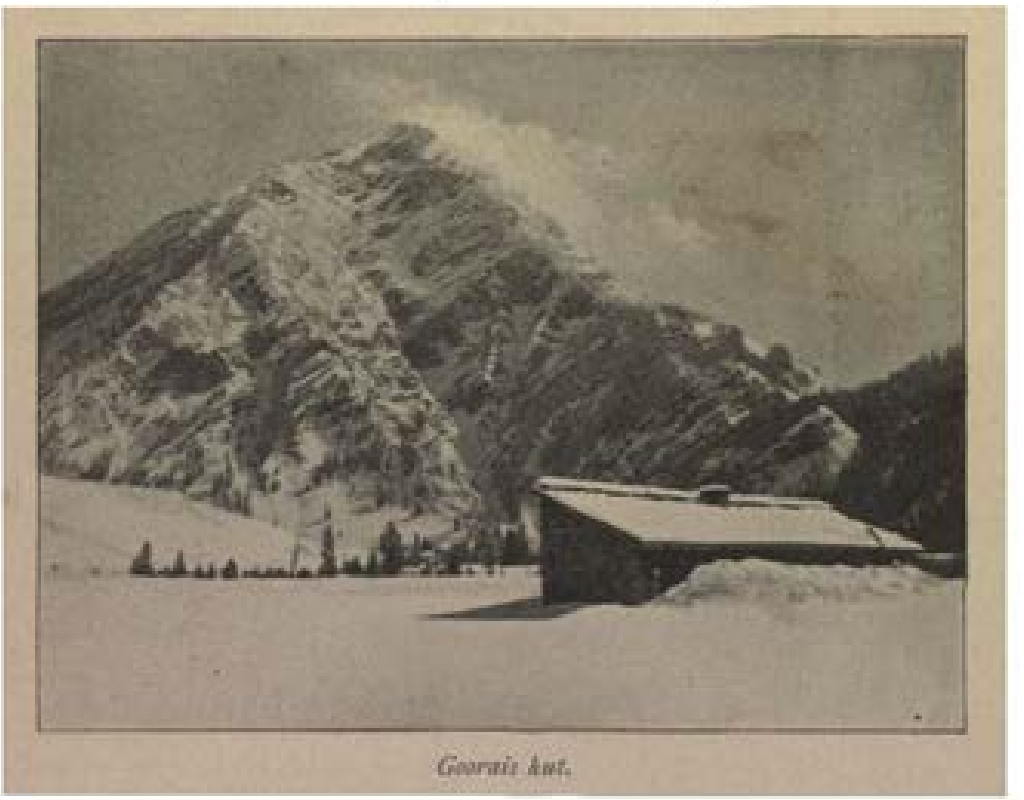
hut, with no food or blankets, damp steamy clothes, and in darkness except for the fitful flame of the smoky fire. I lay down on the hard wooden floor in front of the fire, and, in spite of physical discomfort and anxiety, worn out as I was by the toil of the day, dropped off every now and then into a troubled sleep.

Slowly the long winter night wore on, and when daylight at length began to make the darkness visible, it was only to show that the snow was falling with the same persistent monotony. I was stiff and cramped after the long night in wet clothes on the hard wooden floor, my eyes aching and bloodshot, and my voice hoarse from the stifling pungent smoke; and with a hungry wolfish look, if my expression in any way corresponded to my feelings. I told one of the Kashmiris he must get to a village a short distance off and procure food at all costs, and also try and collect men to form a search-party, though I doubted his being able to do this while the storm raged. He went off, and I did not see him again for many hours; but imagine my joy when, a couple of hours later, I made out a small black speck on the general monochrome of white, which slowly, very slowly, got nearer and more distinct, resolving itself finally into a straggling line of woe-begone battered-looking men—a portion of my coolies. When they reached me, and I had some food, which I was much in need of, I heard their tale. They had struggled on well into the night, when, utterly exhausted and worn out, they had reached a small village, where they had got shelter. Three of them had been caught by a small avalanche, but had been mercifully extricated by the rest before it was too late. Six of them were still out, and these latter did not turn up for four days.

A little farther back on the track over which we had just come—though this I did not learn till later, when

the terrors of the mountains were behind me—a post-runner met his fate, lost in the heart of the great lonely mountains, a single unit in the vast sea of humanity, who would, when the mail did not turn up, form the subject of an official document, in which he would be described as "Missing."

For three more days and nights the storm raged with unabated violence, while I was a prisoner in the



Goorai's hut.

wretched cheerless hut, unable to have even a fire, except for a few minutes at a time, when my feet and hands became so numb with cold as to be unbearable.

At last, on the 24th, the mist rolled up like a curtain, revealing once more the surrounding objects; the storm-clouds parted, and the sun peeped through, cheering us once more with the warmth of his rays. I took the precaution of remaining where I was for the day, as my

guide warned me that the first day of bright sun after a storm was the most dangerous, as then the newly fallen snow came down in great avalanches from the precipitous cliffs, and woe betide the man who is caught by one of these.

On the 25th I started before daylight, in the hope of getting to the end of the day's march early, in case the sun should come out hot during the day and cause the snow to come down the precipitous sides of the valley through which my route lay. The going was fearful, for we sank deep at every step, and as the day dawned, the sky, which had been clear, became overcast, and at midday snow began to fall. After going about ten miles, our way led us uphill again, towards the foot of the pass known as the Raj Diangan, and I have seldom experienced more unpleasant ground to get over than I did for the next few miles. It seemed we were walking over a water-channel filled with great boulders, though, owing to the depth of the snow, we appeared to be walking on level ground, till, with a sudden shock, one found oneself in a hole between the rocks, concealed by the treacherous snow. This continued for several miles, and by the time I reached the hut at Gurai, a distance of fifteen miles in all, which had taken us from before daylight until late in the afternoon, I was absolutely exhausted. A few days before, during the recent storm, an avalanche had come down close to the hut, burying a small stream, the water-supply of the place, and I found a well many feet deep in the snow just completed by the post-runners.

As darkness came down with no diminution of the snowstorm, and no coolies turned up, I looked forward to another night such as I had spent on the 20th, and had settled down on the floor and was half-asleep, when I was roused by shouts outside, and in a few minutes a

coolie burst into the hut. He told me that the rest had been unable to reach me, but were safe in a small village a couple of miles off. He himself and one other had struggled on with food and blankets, but his companion had given up, and he had lost him in the dark. This news was so far satisfactory in that I knew that the coolies, all excepting one, were safe; and, fortified with the cold food and blankets which the man had brought, I managed to pass a better night than might have been expected.

With day snow ceased falling, and as I was gazing anxiously over the huge undulating snow-fields, a sorry spectacle met my eye. Slowly and with halting step a gaunt figure, with a pinched and starved appearance, approached us. On his reaching us I noticed something which made me put out my hand and feel him. His clothes were hard and stiff as boards. The men stood staring and uttering exclamations in an idiotic, imbecile sort of way, till I made them understand that the man was at once to be thawed, when they set to work with a will, pommelling and rubbing him till the wretched individual cried out in pain. It was the coolie who had started with the man who had brought me food and blankets the night before. How he had lived through the night I cannot imagine, for sure enough he had spent it in the snow, and his escape to tell the tale seemed almost a miracle.

Shortly afterwards the remainder of the coolies arrived, and after a few minutes for them to rest, we started on the ascent of the Raj Diangan. I took the precaution, after recent experiences, of bringing a couple of strong men along with me, carrying food and blankets; for I feared that the coolies, who seemed exhausted, might not reach the hut at Tragbal by night. The day was fine, and in spite of the severe labour of scaling the

pass through the deep snow, the spirits of all were higher than they had been for many days; for we were within view of the end of our hardships, and the danger to which we had been daily exposed, of being swept away silently and without warning by the deadly avalanche, would be over on our arrival at the summit of the pass. Hour after hour I forced myself to go on, till I felt as if I must sink down and rest in the soft enticing snow; but the danger was too great, and I at length reached the log-hut over the summit of the pass just as night was falling. Most of the coolies got in at different hours of the night; but a few remained in a post-runner's shanty, a few miles back, till next day.

As I left Tragbal on the 27th, and saw the huge expanse of the vale of Kashmir spread out like a map beneath me, and knew that I had at length reached the edge of the great mountain-chain across which I had been marching, I was filled with a feeling of profound relief and thankfulness.

A few miles straight down the mountain-side, through deep snow and over slippery patches of ice, and I found myself on the banks of the Woolar Lake, where a *doonga* was awaiting me; and a few hours later, my servants and baggage having been got on board, we started for Srinagar. Two and a half days' paddling through the Woolar Lake and up the river Jelum brought us to the capital and civilisation, and my journey across the Himalayas was at an end.

I spent a delightful fortnight in Srinagar, recouping after the hardships of my winter march, during which time I was the guest of Major Bretherton, D.S.O., and Mrs Bretherton, whose kind hospitality I shall long remember; and after a somewhat eventful drive, in the course of which my tonga got stuck in a river late at night,—the bridge which should have spanned it having

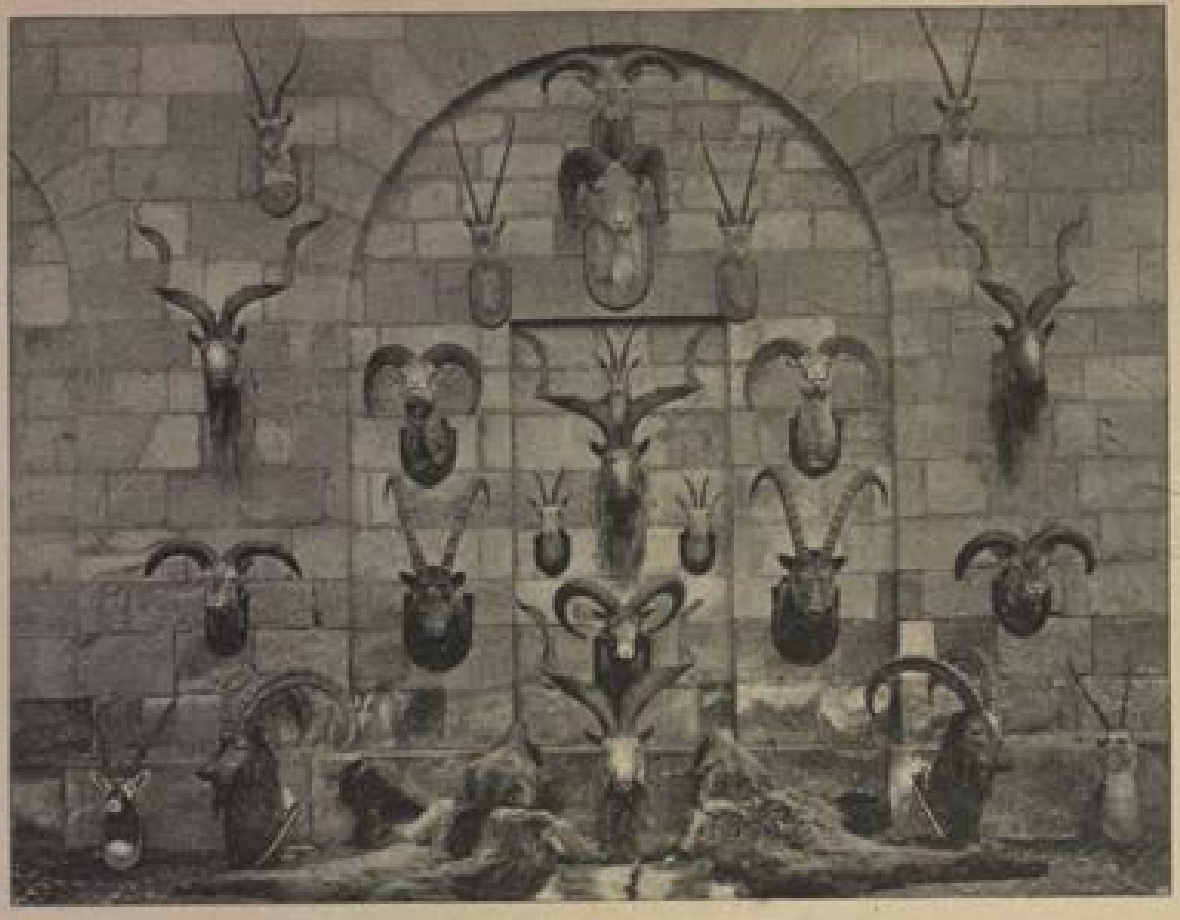
been washed away,—and had to be extricated by a team of bullocks, I once more reached Rawal Pindi at eleven o'clock on the night of February the 16th, a year all but a few days since I had started from the same place on my journey into the heart of the Himalayas.

[A TABLE

A TABLE OF THE DIFFERENT ANIMALS SHOT.

Markhor (Astor)	Capra megaceros	Mar khor	50", 46½", 46", 44¾", 44".
Markhor (Kashmir)	Capra megaceros	Mar khor	42".
Ibex	Capra sibirica	Kail (Kashmiri) / Skin (Balti)	41½", 40½", 40", 39½'.
Snow-bear	Ursus isabellinus	Lāl Bhālu	6' 1½', 5' 6'.
Ovis ammon	Ovis Hodgsoni	Nyán	37½', 17½" in circumf.
Wolf	Canis laniger	Shonko	4' 11' (including tail).
Oorial	Ovis vignei	Sharpoo	27", 26½'.
Burhel	Ovis nahura	Napoo	24".
Tibetan antelope	Pantholops Hodgsoni	Haran	23", 23", 22".
Tibetan gazelle	Gazella picticaudata	Goa	12", 11½".
Barasingh	Cervus kashmerianus	Hangol.	

The total number of animals shot during the expedition was 36. In the above table are enumerated the different varieties of game shot, together with their common names, scientific names, local names, and the horn measurements of the best specimens. I have kept to Ovis ammon as the common name for the *Ovis Hodgsoni*, in spite of its being in reality incorrect, as I find that this Tibetan sheep is generally known to sportsmen by this name.



THE BEST OF THE BAG.

KASHMIR AND THE ADJOINING COUNTRIES
SHOWING LORD RONALDSHAY'S ROUTE

PART II.

FROM SIMLA TO LONDON BY LAND

VIÂ QUETTA, NUSHKI, SISTAN, MESHED, AND THE CASPIAN

"But me thou must bear hence, not send with them,
But carry me with thee to Seistan,
And place me on a bed, and mourn for me,
Thou and the snow-haired Zal, and all thy friends.
And thou must lay me in that lovely earth,
And heap a stately mound above my bones,
And plant a far-seen pillar over all;
That so the passing horseman on the waste
May see my tomb a great way off and cry:
'Sohrab, the mighty Rustum's son, lies here,
Whom his great father did in ignorance kill!'
And I be not forgotten in my grave."

—MATTHEW ARNOLD, *The Death of Sohrab.*

CHAPTER I.

A GLIMPSE AT THE NORTH-WEST FRONTIER.

Unrest—Selection of route—Leave Simla—Dera Ishmail Khan—Tank—A narrow escape—Murtaza—Kashmir Kar—Trans-Indus markhor—Return to Dera Ishmail Khan—Mâhsûd marauders—Mooltan—Journey to Quetta—Preparations for a long journey—Baloochis engaged as escort—Theory of a double camp—Trouble in getting a pony—Camped on Takatoo—Agricultural possibilities of the country—A Pathan's idea of a tasty meal—My caravan makes a start.

SOMETHING over seven months had elapsed since my return to India from the fascinating dominions of his Highness the Maharajah of Kashmir, the greater part of which time I had spent at Simla as a member of the Viceroy's personal staff; and though I had at different times come in for sport in a variety of forms,—including pig-sticking, black-buck-shooting, and a week after tiger in the low-lying jungles of the Terai, all most enjoyable as long as they lasted,—yet the spirit of unrest awoke ere long within me, excited to a pitch of feverish activity by the terrible monotony of life at a hill station, and became so peremptory in its importunities as to give me no peace till the maps were out and I was searching their pages in an endeavour to find some district which would satisfy the craving which pervaded me for the unhampered freedom of the desert. There were various reasons which made it expedient that England should be the goal at the end of the journey,

which somewhat narrowed the choice for selection. The journey home *viâ* Japan and America in no way met the requirements of the case; a sea voyage across the Arabian Sea and up the Persian Gulf to Busra, whence up the Tigris and through Asia Minor to the coast at Alexandretta, was more of the nature required, but rather short; a journey across the Pamirs to the Russian railway in Central Asia was hackneyed, to say nothing of the improbability of carrying it through successfully in winter. But beyond all these there remained still one possible route, which promised to fulfil all the requirements, and which I at once fixed upon as being the very thing I wanted. For some time past attention had been directed to a new trade-route, which, starting from Quetta, crossed over the little-known tracts of Baloochistan to a country on the confines of Persia and Afghanistan, known as Sistan. Thence it would be possible to travel up through Eastern Persia to Meshed, far famed as the last resting-place of Iman Reza, one of the most noted of all the followers of the Prophet, from which place, armed with the necessary passports, it would be easy to reach the Russian military railway in Transcaspia. This once determined on, there was nothing to hinder me sitting down to make arrangements with all speed, a task to which I willingly devoted my attention, and preliminaries having been settled, I packed my trunks and made ready for a start.

The climate at Simla was perfect: the long dreary rains were over, and autumn, grandest season of the whole year, had set in, with its cloudless skies and crisp invigorating air, so that, now that the hour of departure was actually at hand, it was with feelings of expectation mingled with regret that I climbed into my tonga soon after midday on October the 15th, 1900, to

be trundled down the hill to the stuffy dusty plains below.

At Kalka I was lucky enough to find a railway carriage to pass the night in, an improvement on the edifice under whose roof it had been my fortune, or rather misfortune, to spend a night on a former occasion, which gloried, as far as I remember, in the designation of hotel; and in the early hours of the morning, having been attached to the daily train, I steamed out of the station on my journey west.

In order to give my heavy baggage—such as tents, camp furniture, stores, &c.—time to reach Quetta, I left the main line at Sher Shah junction with a view to visiting certain parts of the north-west frontier, and after a journey of thirty-three hours by train, with the usual complement of discomforts caused by heat, dust, prolonged waits, and night changes, reached Derya-khan, whence I proceeded by road to the town of Dera Ishmail Khan. The road over which I drove is merely a temporary way, varying in distance and direction every year, according to the vagaries of the Indus. This year it was practically direct, the distance being from fourteen to fifteen miles, and consisted of a track of dry grass and rushes laid over what was probably at one time or another river-bed, till about five miles from the town, where it reached the Indus, which it crossed by a bridge of boats.

Dera Ishmail Khan gives one the impression of a kahki town in a kahki desert, with a few trees scattered about by the thoughtful hand of man, and must be an intensely dreary place to have to live in—an estimate which its pseudonym of Dreary Dismal leads me to suppose is held by others also. I was put up and hospitably entertained by Mr W. Merk, commissioner of Derajat, who was on his way to Tank,

a small village on the frontier, whither I myself was bound, and the following afternoon we started off together.

Our road lay over a huge plain of desert land, and for forty interminable miles we were shaken and jolted along in a tonga of distinctly inferior build. There was very little sign of life on the way: an occasional caravan of camels, and here and there a family of Gilzais, who had come down from the mountains for the winter, and pitched their black tents wherever water was to be found. At Tank I spent the night in a P.W.D. bungalow, where I narrowly escaped having an effectual stop put to my wanderings. Just before going to bed I had occasion to step outside, and foolishly left my room barefoot and without a light. On my return I was attracted by a peculiar rustling at my feet, as of something creeping stealthily along the ground, and startled by the uncanny sound, and by a sudden instinctive feeling of the near presence of some noisome creature, I sprang hurriedly aside and got hold of a light. Prompt investigation showed a large krait stretched across the doorway! A krait bite is certain death, and the nature of my escape was forcibly brought home to me when Merk, who had come in to see what the disturbance was about, pleasantly remarked that he would of course have cut off my leg with pleasure, though my chance of survival even in spite of such drastic measures (or perhaps because of them!) would have been practically nil. This particular krait got killed instead of dealing death himself, and when stretched out must have measured from 2½ to 3 feet.

Merk having business in connection with an impending blockade of the Māhsūd tribe, who had been indulging in their favourite pastime of pillage, murder,

and loot to an unwarrantable extent, remained at Tank, where I left him on the 19th and embarked on a drive of twenty miles to Murtaza, a mud fort at the foot of the Suleiman mountains, at the point at which the Gomal Pass debouches on to the plain, held by a company of native border police. All day long a hot dry wind blew over the desert, creating a sand-storm of the most disgusting description, which covered us with a shroud of fine penetrating sand, and choked and almost blinded us.

I spent the night at Murtaza, in the comfort derived from the sense of security afforded by a loaded mauser under my pillow and a sepoy with fixed bayonet in the verandah. The only transport I found available beyond this consisted of bullocks,—for here the road came to an end, and no camels were at hand,—so got them loaded and started off before daylight on the morning of Saturday the 20th. For myself I got a border police pony, with a very small and antiquated military saddle, and another for my cook, and at 7 A.M. we started off with an escort of border police. Thus we entered the mountains, a wilderness of stone and rabble, with here and there huge piles of conglomerate, rising up in fantastic shapes like giant towers and fortresses. Twelve miles on we reached a mud fort,—Neilly Kutch,—another possession of the border police, and here I overtook my transport, for bullocks go very very slowly!

A mile or two beyond Neilly Kutch all track ceased, and we were making our own tracks from there up the dry bed of a river, where the going was bad as only dry river-beds can be. We pushed steadily on, and at 3 P.M. I asked one of my escort how far we were from Kashmir Kar? Quite close, he said. Four o'clock came and with it a heavy thunderstorm; but no signs

of our destination. I got my pony into a canter, for the going had become somewhat better; but it was another hour's hard riding before we sighted a small mud fort on the shoulder of a hill, and realised that we had at last reached Kashmir Kar, a quaint little mud fort, like all the others I had seen, built square, and with a small room in one angle with fireplace, table, and chair.

The bullocks did not turn up, and I saw every prospect of a night in my clothes and no dinner. I reflected, however, that it would not be for the first time, and probably not the last, and set about making the best of things. As it turned out, it might have been a great deal worse than it was, as a *charpoi* (native bedstead) was produced, and an ancient fowl, said to be running about the fort somewhere, was after some difficulty found and caught, and I dined quite regally off her and *atta chappaties*.

The next few days I intended spending in search of the straight-horned markhor, and interviewed the jemadar of the fort. He could not talk much Hindustani, Pushtoo being his language, but the munshi in supreme command spoke excellent Hindustani and acted as interpreter. This particular fort is occupied by levies of the Miani and Sherani tribes, about twenty all told. They are curious wild-looking fellows, with no particular uniform, but armed with Snider rifles.

The jemadar volunteered to act as shikarie, and gave great hopes of sport. Accordingly on Monday the 22nd —my baggage having turned up on Sunday—I and my Miani shikarie, with three other individuals of sorts as an escort, started in the early hours of the morning to search the neighbouring mountains for game. After climbing for three or four hours we came rather suddenly upon two black bears. I got a shot at one of

them, but though I knocked him over he got up again and managed to escape. About two o'clock we made out some markhor of the trans-Indus variety, and through my glasses I made out one with a fine head. Unfortunately they were very restless and would not settle anywhere, and the result was the climbing up and down of many *khuds*, resembling the sides of houses, by us, in a vain endeavour to get near the markhor, and in our finally having to leave them in order to get back to the shelter of the fort by night. When I did get back I found that my one and only servant, Abdul Hag, had seized the opportunity of getting fever. Dinner was consequently a very moderate affair, and as I had had very little to eat since 6 A.M. I was not in the sweetest of tempers.

For two or three days more I tried my luck among the mountains round, and saw on one occasion a markhor with a really fine head; but a beast of an oorial came galloping along the mountain-side and put him up before I was within shot, and I never managed to get near him again. The climbing powers of these beasts are quite extraordinary, and while I was watching this very buck through the telescope he actually clambered up the slanting trunk of a tree to a height of several feet from the ground in order to get at some tempting leaves above him; and I am bound to say that had I not seen it with my own eyes I could hardly have believed it possible that a quadruped of his weight and size—he must have stood at least 9 hands at the shoulder—could have copied with such apparent ease the habits one would naturally associate with a squirrel. The only shot I got at one of these markhor was a snapshot at a beast with an inferior head which I missed, and the only animal I killed while in these regions was an oorial.

On Saturday the 27th I left Kashmir Kar at 8 A.M. with my border police and a few of the Miani levies, being lucky enough to secure some camels which had brought up some stores to the little garrison for my baggage, and marching all day reached Neilly Kutch at 5 P.M. I stayed the night in the fort, and leaving at six in the morning, reached Murtaza at nine. Here I got a tonga and drove through the sixty miles to Dera

Leaving Kashmir Kar.

Ishmail Khan, where I stayed the night with the Merks, Mrs Merk having arrived from Dera Gazi Khan the day before.

It is a wild exciting corner of the Empire this rugged mountain frontier, and it had been the scene of wild doings of late. A few miles south of Kashmir Kar a whole caravan of camels had vanished, men and all, nothing but the saddles being left, and had not been heard of since. Then again on the 23rd the Mâhsûds had come down by night, shot the sentry at a small post near Tank, and made off with a number of rifles and other arms. A young officer, Hennesey by name, started off with a company of Sikhs to intercept the raiders, in which he was successful. In the first

volley that was fired one of the marauders was left wounded on the ground. He called to his comrades to carry him off, but not they! They were much too occupied in getting themselves and their own rifles away. In the meanwhile the wounded man had crawled among the rocks, and Hennesey, who was walking about looking for him,—a rash proceeding where a treacherous Pathan is concerned,—unfortunately passed by quite close to him without seeing him. The wounded man, unable to do little more than crawl, still had sufficient strength to use his rifle, and raising it stealthily to his shoulder, shot him dead through the back! Needless to say, vengeance came swift and sure from the infuriated Sikhs. Poor Hennesey, he died a violent death, struck down by fate at the very outset of his career, while carrying out his duty: a true son of Britain, such as it his country's pride to boast of.

There was nothing to detain me longer at Dera Ishmail Khan, unless I was to make an expedition to Sheik Budin, an isolated hill some distance off, where markhor of the Suleiman variety were to be found; but for this I decided I could hardly spare the time, and on Monday evening once more reached the line.

With a lack of consideration peculiar to railway officials all the world over, I was ejected from the rumbling, plodding Derya Khan train, and deposited upon a cheerless-looking station platform at Mooltan at 8 A.M. on the morning of October the 30th, precisely nineteen hours before the mail train for Quetta, whither I was endeavouring to make my way, was due to pass through.

Mooltan, best known perhaps as one of the hottest spots in India, I found most dreary and uninteresting, possessed of none of the usual sights to help the traveller, whose ill-fortune may happen to strand him

there, to while away the time; and after driving through the bazaar, and seeing what little there was to be seen, nothing remained to be done but sit still and pray for the day to pass.

Owing to peculiarly bad food at the *dāk*-bungalow—India's conception of an inn—I was by evening very unwell! but the thought of another such day at Mooltan roused in me sufficient energy to struggle to the station, and by 4 A.M. I was once more rumbling along amid the familiar surroundings of an Indian railway carriage. All day long we journeyed over the burning deserts of Scind, the heat even at this time of year being of the kind which admits of nothing but keeping quiet in the thinnest of thin pyjamas, and engenders a desperate longing for the day to pass. To add to the discomfort of the journey, Ruk junction was reached at four in the afternoon,—a most dismal and depressing place, where it was necessary to change and wait till 10 P.M. before further progress could be made.

A cool refreshing breeze was blowing steadily down the Bolan, one of the great natural gateways in the mountain barriers of the north-west frontier, as the train steamed slowly up towards the elevated table-land beyond on the morning of the 1st, bringing with it pleasant reminders of clear frosty mornings left behind at Simla. Puffing and groaning under the strain, we crawled laboriously up the steep incline, winding along precipitous mountain-sides, creeping through tunnels hewn in the naked rock, till at length, having reached the summit, we travelled at a rather more respectable pace over a huge stretch of arid, stony plateau, and shortly after midday steamed into the station at Quetta, the end, so far as I was concerned, of railways and suchlike civilised modes of progression for many days to come.

Every one knows how much there is to be done before starting on a journey involving the carrying of a camp and all its necessary appurtenances, especially if such journey is to be one of weeks' duration, and one on which everything that is required must be taken, with the exception of such things as one may reasonably expect to find on the road—in this case little beyond an occasional sheep, and here and there chickens and eggs, and sometimes milk; and my warmest thanks are due to Mr R. Buller-Hughes, C.S., at that time first assistant to the agent to the Governor-General for Baloochistan, not only for the cordial hospitality accorded me by him and Mrs Buller-Hughes throughout my stay in Quetta, but also for the immense amount of trouble he took in procuring transport, &c., for me, and in giving me assistance and valuable advice throughout my preparations.

As, owing to difficulty in getting mules or ponies, I was taking camel transport, which animal seldom exceeds the monotonous pace of two miles an hour, I had settled to take a double camp, and with this idea had obtained all my tents, furniture, cooking utensils, &c., in duplicate, the tents consisting of light 80-lb. field-service tents, and *sowars'* palls for the servants, from the Elgin Mills at Cawnpore, and the rest from Messrs Luscomb & Co. of Allahabad, all of which I found ready waiting on my arrival at Quetta. For carrying stores, cooking-pots, and other small odds and ends, I got strong wooden camel-trunks bound with iron, which slung in pairs across a camel's back and balanced one another; and for carrying other things—such as rolls of bedding, furniture, and clothes-bags—strong cord nets, known as *tarangas*. In addition I obtained a pair of sleeping *kajawas* for each camp,—arrangements of wood and cord, something after the

nature of panniers,—which hung one on each side of a camel, and in which a man could recline more or less comfortably. These for the servants attached to the two camps while on the march: one *bihisti* and one *sweeper* to each camp. For the other servants who were not double—Ram Pershad, *bearer;* Abdul Hag, cook; and Ram Ful, *syce*—I bought riding camels, which enabled them to do the day's march in sufficient time to perform their duties at each camp. For myself I bought a pony. As an escort, and to make themselves generally useful, I engaged a *daffidar* (sergeant) and three *sowars* (troopers) of the local levy from Nushki, wild-looking horsemen of the Brahui tribe, with long hair and flowing robes, whom I armed with Snider rifles. They provided their own ponies, and proved a most useful addition to my establishment.

One camp was always to be sent on ahead by night in charge of two of the *sowars*, so that when I got to the end of the march the following day I should always find camp pitched and ready for me. The camels that had brought this camp were then ready to take the rear camp on again as soon as it came up in the evening, things thus working smoothly and easily, and long marches being made possible with slow transport.

It must not be supposed that all these arrangements were made without considerable trouble; indeed, the difficulties I experienced in securing a suitable pony were almost comic. Having tried and bought one that I thought would do, a raw animal lately come in from Afghanistan, I found him the next day dead lame! I had actually paid the money—Rs. 100—to the native dealer, but found, somewhat to my surprise I must admit, that he took the pony back and restored the money,—an act due, I imagine, to the wholesome respect in which he held Buller-Hughes. After this all

sorts and conditions of ponies turned up to be tried, until an officer of the Bombay Cavalry, hearing of my difficulty, came to the rescue by offering to supply me with a suitable animal, which he promised to have sent round. The day before I started no pony had come, so I wrote asking that it might be sent with the bearer. In the evening I happened to meet the officer at the club, when he mentioned that he had sent me the pony in the morning. On hearing that it had never reached me, he said he would make inquiries; and later in the evening I got a note saying that it was not altogether surprising that the animal had never turned up, as it had died of colic on the way! He, however, sent another, which he hoped would do.

A brisk trade in horse-flesh seems likely to spring up by the new Nushki-Sistan trade-route. There was a dealer in Quetta at this time who told me that he had lately come through with a string of from fifty to sixty ponies from Persia, the greater number of which he had already sold. Another gentleman had tried to bring a lot from Meshed to Quetta through Afghanistan, a much shorter though more dangerous route. He had got through, and that was all, leaving one of his ponies behind him with an Afghan gentleman, who had been so pressing with his hospitality as to induce the dealer to take his leave hurriedly under cover of dark, the said pony getting left behind in the hurry and bustle of departure.

While waiting for my servants to make final preparations, and bid farewell to their families, I took the opportunity of going into some neighbouring mountains with a tent and rifle, and spent three days on the rocky sides of Takatoo, a peak to the north-east of Quetta. The view of the Quetta plateau which I obtained from here presented a huge elevated table-

land, intersected with mountain-ridges of rock and sand, barren and destitute beyond description, — a parched, waterless land in which the eye seeks in vain for something on which to rest. Yet all that is required to convert this apparently desolate waste into a veritable garden of Eden is water. The magic of water here is wonderful: at its touch fruit of all sorts springs into existence; and the grapes, peaches, nectarines, and other fruits that grow in the open at Quetta under the influence of artificial irrigation can hold their own against the productions of any English hothouse.

From the point of view of sport my visit to the precipitous sides of rocky Takatoo was not a great success, as I saw nothing worth a shot till I was making my way down the mountain-side on my return to Quetta, when I came across an oorial, which I shot, though on reaching the fallen animal I found his head smaller than I had thought, and hardly worth keeping. The beak-nosed Pathan, however, who was with me considered it a capital day's sport, and having made a fire with what scrub was to be found in the vicinity, he pitchforked the greater part of the animal's interior economy into it and devoured the savoury morsels greedily as soon as he considered them sufficiently burnt. He subsequently informed me that he had had very little to eat during the previous three days, which accounted no doubt for his expression of unalloyed satisfaction as he swallowed the smoked and unpalatable-looking pieces.

At last on the 9th all things were ready, and I started off my caravan in charge of the three *sowars*. Ten baggage-camels in all, it looked quite imposing as it filed slowly out of the compound on to the road outside. I kept behind with me my *daffidar*, Ralmat Khan, my

bearer, and my *syce*, with two of the riding-camels and my pony, in order to give the caravan a day's start and to get through a good long march on the morrow. The baggage-camels I had hired as far as Nasratabad in Sistan; but the riding-camels I had had to buy, and had engaged two *camel-sowars* to look after them. One more addition to my caravan had unexpectedly turned up the day before in the person of a dark gentleman, who begged leave to accompany me as he had heard that I was starting for Meshed, since he was anxious to make a pilgrimage to the holy city; and bidding him go on with the caravan, I watched them grow slowly smaller and smaller, till they were lost to view at length in the distance, launched on the vast tracts of desert land which lay between me and my goal, when I turned slowly back to the house filled with that curious feeling—quaint mixture of excitement, anxiety, and expectation—which must surely assail any one on the point of embarking on a journey where the issue is hard to foresee.

CHAPTER II.

QUETTA TO NASRATABAD.

Baloochi villages—Karnak—Girdi Gab—Kishingi—Nushki—Prospects of the growth of Nushki—A heavy storm—The Baloochi camel—Lost in a fog—Fever in camp—In search of game in the Kharan mountains—Dalbandin—Brackish water—Meroi—Chah Sandan—*Kafilahs* on the route—Tratoh—Tales of the Koh-i-Sultan—Mashki Chah—Ware Chah—Wild Asses—Makak karez—Sainduk—Game of the Sainduk mountains—Kirtaka—Where three countries meet—Robat—Hormak—Nowad Chah—Ruined cities—Girdi Thana—Asak Chah—A Baloochi sirdar—The approach to the capital—Nasratabad.

A CURIOUS white mist hung over Quetta on the morning of the 10th, hiding it from view as I cantered along the road, accompanied by Ralmat Khan and the servants on their camels. After leaving the main road a few miles from the town, we made our way by a camel-track over flat stretches of sand and gravel, covered for the most part with brown tufts of aromatic wormwood, with ridges of barren hills running parallel on either side. Here and there we passed small villages, mere clumps of low flat-roofed mud huts, whose existence must inevitably come to an untimely end should the country ever be visited by anything like prolonged rain; miserable evidence of human existence—low and squat-looking, with no apparent aperture beyond an ill-shaped hole, presumably the door.

In parts the track was very stony, and anything

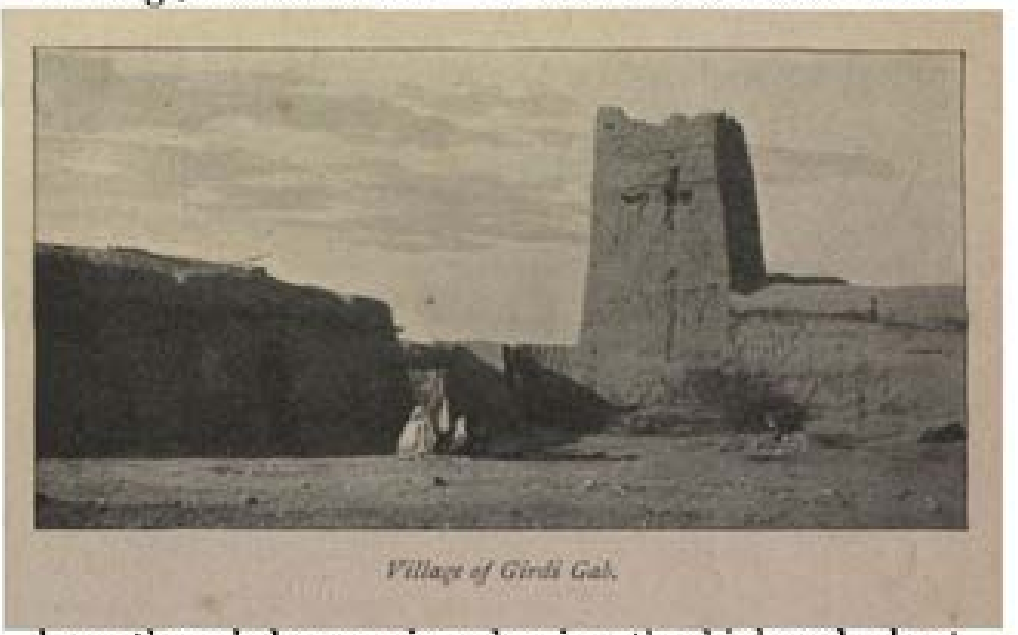
beyond a walk out of the question ; but at others sand took the place of stone, and we were able to go along at a canter. At sixteen miles we passed the levy-post of Girdi Talab, and another sixteen brought us to Karnak, where I found my camp and spent the night. On my arrival the three *sowars* who had gone with the camp the day before, came and shook me warmly by the hand as if they had just found a long-lost friend!—a form of salutation of which the tribes of Baloochistan appear to be particularly fond, and which if allowed full play is apt to become a nuisance.

Karnak is a levy-post such as exist, or are in process of construction, at intervals of from fifteen to fifty miles, the whole way from Quetta to Sistan. They consist of mud forts known as *thanas*, built square and with an erection in one or more of the angles in the form of a tower. In these *thanas* live a *daffidar* and a few *sowars* raised locally, who carry the mail-bag mounted, sometimes on ponies, sometimes on camels, from *thana* to *thana*, thus maintaining the only communication that exists, between Sistan and the nearest British post of any account—Quetta ; a distance of something like 500 miles over the deserted wastes of Baloochistan.

I left Karnak at 9 A.M., having sent my advance-camp on during the night, and rode over the same sandy and stony plateau, with its covering of worm-wood, crossing a low ridge of hills after going a few miles, by a pass known as the Barāg, and then on over level ground again till I reached camp pitched by a small partially deserted village—Girdi Gab. Here I found Mr T. Hughes, the deputy assistant superintendent of police of the district, who had come up from Nushki to meet me. The village was the same miserable affair as all the others I had passed on the road,

a huddled-up collection of low mud huts, which in this case were rapidly falling into decay, the headman, who had been given some money by the Government a year before with a view to the improvement of his village, having promptly decamped and bolted into Afghanistan, money and all, where he had remained under the protection of the Amir ever since.

My advance-camp was as usual sent on overnight, and at 9 A.M. on the 12th Hughes and I started for Kishingi, our next halt. The road was still as it had



Village of Girdi Gak.

been the whole way since leaving the highroad, about six miles from Quetta, a mere camel-track. At one place, a pass among some low hills, we came across a small pool of water and had lunch, after which we cantered on again till we reached camp at Kishingi, about twenty-four miles. There was no village here, but a small mud fort in process of building.

On the 13th we started as usual about nine o'clock, and after covering some miles, reached the edge of the plateau along which the track had run since leaving Quetta. From here our path descended somewhat

abruptly through a labyrinth of small hills and knolls, among which it wound till it debouched on to the plain on which Nushki stands. I inquired the name of the defile by which we had descended; but all that I could make out from my followers was that it was *khand*, which is merely the Pushtoo word for a pass, so I conclude that it has no name.

On reaching the plain we were met by a party of about twenty men in many-coloured garments, and mounted on gaily caparisoned steeds, with wonderful saddle-cloths of gorgeous design and colour — the aristocracy of the Nushki district.

Main street, Nushki.

A little farther on we came in sight of Nushki itself. It appeared to be little more than a glorified edition of all the other villages we had seen: the same one-storey mud houses, though with something more like method displayed in the ground-plan of the place. A broad street led through the centre, faced at the far end by a large rectangular building, also of mud, which contained the police lines, the levy lines, and the post-office. A short way from the main street, and clear of the town, stands a hospital, and beyond this again a caravanserai for the use of *kafilahs* or caravans; and these with about 120 shops go to make the town of Nushki, which

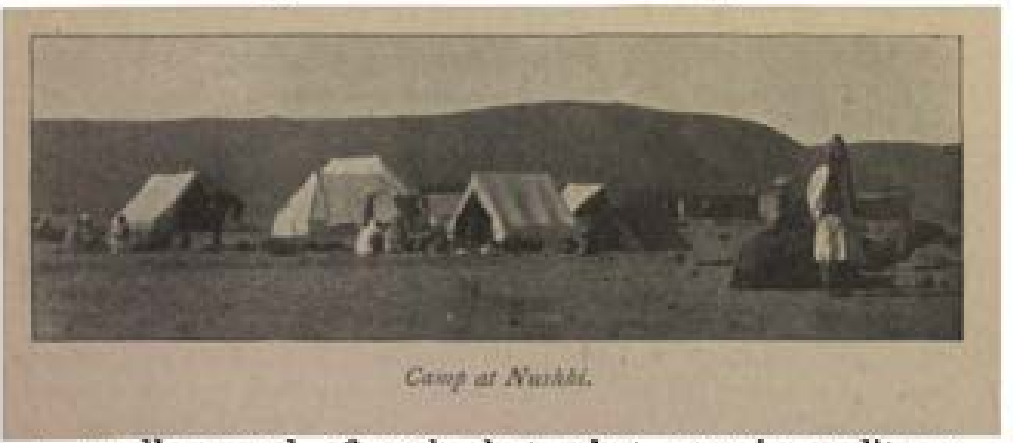
all told probably consists of about 200 houses. The population is at present hardly in proportion to the size of the place, as I was informed that it was at this time about 250 people; but the place is young, the land having been but lately acquired by Government, and considering that three years ago there was nothing, the progress made must be considered fair.[1] Along one side of the town flows a small

[1] The administration of the Nushki district and the border strip of desert, "that crude and unfinished stretch of Asia which lies between Quetta and Persian Khurasan," was taken over by the Indian Government, by arrangement with the Khan of Kalat, in connection with the inauguration of the present trade-route under Captain Webb Ware in December 1896. Prior to the year 1896 there were certain questions of a political nature which it was necessary to take up before it was possible to embark upon the construction of a practical trade-route. The Amir of Afghanistan, whose fiscal policy was of a kind well calculated to stifle trade however virile, was in occupation of the Chargai district, through which lay the direct route from Nushki to Sistan. It was therefore desirable that a change should be effected in the ownership of this district, and in accordance with the agreement of 1893—an agreement so prolific of results in the delimitation of boundaries—drawn up between Sir Mortimer Durand and the Amir, by which the Chargai district was assigned to the British sphere, a boundary commission under Captain M'Mahon was occupied from 1894 to 1896 in demarcating the frontier line of Afghanistan south of the Helmund. Similarly in 1895, by agreement with the Shah of Persia, a commission under Colonel Sir T. Holdich took up the "political legacy bequeathed by the Sistan boundary arbitration of Sir F. Goldsmid" of 1872, by defining what had up to that time been a delightfully nebulous Perso-Balooch frontier, extending for 300 miles from Kohuk, on the Mashkel river, to the Malek Siah Koh, at the south-west corner of Afghanistan. At this point exists a boundary pillar marking the junction of the Perso-Balooch boundary of Sir T. Holdich, and the Afghan-Balooch boundary of Captain M'Mahon. (For a delightful account of the proceedings of the Perso-Balooch Boundary Commission, see 'The Indian Borderland,' by Colonel Sir T. H. Holdich, chap. xiv.)

These preliminaries brought to a satisfactory conclusion, it was possible to make arrangements for constructing a trade-route which would run through territory under British administration the whole way to the Persian border, and for rendering such route secure from the uncouth pleasantries of borderland marauders. A further advance was made in the interests of law and order in the year 1899, when the Nushki district was leased from the Khan of Kalat on a perpetual quit-rent of Rs. 9000 per annum.

stream, the Kaiser, which forms the water-supply of the place, and growing on its banks were to be seen about a dozen trees, scattered here and there, in clumps of two and three, looking quaintly out of place amid the surrounding chaos of sand and stone. Passing through the town, we emerged on the far side to find camp pitched at the foot of a small hill where Hughes at present lives, the bungalow which is intended for him being still in process of construction, at the top of the hill, overlooking the town.

Over the plain to the north, and clearly visible from our camp, could be seen what appeared to be



Camp at Nushki.

a small mound of rock, but what was in reality a hill of considerable size, on the top of which stands a stone, one of the boundary pillars between the lands of his Highness Abdur Rahman Khan and Baloochistan, beyond which lies forbidden ground; but with the exception of this, the objects of interest at Nushki are few, and there is nothing to induce one to prolong one's stay further than is actually necessary to rest one's camels.

The future growth and prosperity of Nushki must depend upon whether it or Quetta is to be the starting-point of caravans to cross the desolate

stretches which lie between it and Sistan. At present *kafilahs* make it a halting-place, as they have perforce to go on to Quetta; but it appeared to me as I came along that a line from Quetta would be by no means an impossible undertaking, and in the event of such a line being constructed, Nushki would undoubtedly become a large and flourishing place. Whether the water-supply would under such altered circumstances be equal to the demand is another matter.

That Nushki is a far more suitable starting-point and terminus to the caravan-route than Quetta must be perfectly obvious to any one who has seen the two places—the large open stretches round Nushki, capable of affording ample grazing for any number of camels, being wanting at Quetta; while standing as it does on the plain, at the same level practically as the whole of the route to Sistan, the ascent of over 2000 feet to the Quetta plateau, most unsuitable to camel transport, is obviated: but the construction of a railway in the near future will depend upon whether the increase of trade is sufficient to warrant such an undertaking. In any case, it is probable that the experiment will be first made with a cart-road before the more costly undertaking is embarked on, and those who are in favour of increased facility for communication between the two places may perhaps take hope from the fact that a telegraph line had at this time been open and in working order for several months.

Having been told that for the last five years there had been little or no rain,—the yearly rainfall is, I believe, about 8 inches,—I was hardly prepared for the deluge that swept down on us on the night

of the 13th and early hours of the 14th; but it is a long time since I have experienced a storm of equal violence to the one that deluged our camp on this occasion, and converted what had been dry sand into a mass of mud and dirty water. The wind shrieked and howled, the thunder roared, and the lightning illuminated the whole landscape for seconds at a time. Camping on grass is bad enough under these conditions, but camping on mud!

Rain continued pretty steadily on the 14th, and the tents had to be struck and sent off wet, while every one was kept busy when not otherwise employed, digging trenches in all directions to carry off the water and save our camp from being inundated. In addition to the weather I had to put up with another misfortune; for one of my riding camels turned out badly, being so weak as to be able to proceed at nothing better than a slow walk. As this was quite useless, I sent him back to Quetta with his *sowar*, with a note to Buller-Hughes asking him to dispose of him if he could.

To deal satisfactorily in camels requires experience. My experience taught me that it is inadvisable to buy a camel without previously examining his hump. Unless he has a good hump do not buy him. A camel with a good hump will live on it, and at the end of a long journey, unless he has been exceptionally well fed, the hump will have gone, or nearly so. Then he must be rested and fed up till the hump returns. The Baloochi baggage-camel is a curious beast, and of a hardier stamp than the more delicate trotting camel. When kneeling down to be loaded he gurgles, and bubbles, and splutters, and makes all sorts of objectionable noises in protest, and unless carefully watched, will

generally seize the exact moment—when everything is piled on him, but unsecured—to rise with a snort to his feet, thereby upsetting everything, and breaking anything that does not happen to be made of wrought iron. When once fairly started, however, he goes along at a monotonous two miles an hour, and carries his load of 400 lb. for twenty miles a-day with a rest every fifth or sixth.

Hughes had made arrangements to go to Dalbandin,

The country round Nushki.

about 120 miles on the road beyond Nushki, so we started off together on the morning of the 15th. Our way lay south-west over perfectly flat plain, towards a mountain-peak, Sheik Hussein, which stood up from the plain to a height of upwards of 7000 feet above sea-level, beneath whose jet-black sides our next camp lay. Before long we became enveloped in a thick white mist, a most unusual phenomenon, I should imagine, in this burnt-up corner of the earth, which obliterated everything most effectually, and the next thing we did was

to get off the track. This was by no means difficult, as everything looked exactly the same in the fog, and there was absolutely nothing to guide us. The track, too, was merely marked off from the rest of the plain by a broken line of small stones, and here and there by a very shallow ditch, and it was some time before any of us realised that we were off it. When it cleared at about midday, we found we were a good deal north-west of where we ought to have been, with the result that we did not get into camp till after four o'clock. We ought, I believe, to have passed at least two villages on the way; but owing to the fog we had missed them both clean, and for all I saw the country might have been totally devoid of human habitation.

As a result of the rain and damp, camp was visited by an epidemic of fever, and I was laid up with a severe attack myself, which necessitated our halting the next day where we were. The name of the place was Mull, and consisted of the usual *thana*. Situated under the shining black rock of Sheik Hussein, and surrounded by clusters of tamarisk-trees, Mull made an exceedingly pretty picture, which is a great deal more than can be said of most of the country. From here the road took us along close under the Kharan Mountains, while to the north stretched miles of sand covered with stunted tamarisk, and broken here and there in the far distance by low hills. On the 17th we camped at Kuchaki Chah, a small *thana* and well in the middle of a dreary plain of black gravel at the foot of the mountains, at which dismal spot I was most reluctantly compelled to halt again, owing to a return of fever: thanks, however, to a dose of antipyrine, followed by a liberal allowance of quinine, I was sufficiently recovered to go on again on the 19th, when we reached Padag. The weather was still boisterous and

most unpleasant, rain being varied by severe gales of wind.

The next day Hughes and I parted, he going on to Dalbandin, while I left the track and turned into the mountains to the south with a view to shooting some Scind ibex, which were reported to be plentiful in the neighbourhood. The shoot, however, was a failure, as we never set eyes on a single beast, the local shikarie whom I had with me averring that the recent storms had driven all game from the northern faces of the mountains; and as he was confident that no game would be found while such weather continued, I returned to

Camping in Baluchistan.

the road after two or three days' futile search and camped near the *thana* at Yadgar Chah on the 24th. That under favourable circumstances the Scind ibex is to be found on these mountains in considerable numbers admits of no doubt, the few Englishmen who have up to the present time shot in the Kharan hills having come across them in large numbers, and invariably obtained good heads, with horns of 40 inches and upwards. The Persian gazelle, too, is to be found on the plains near Mull; but owing to the heavy fall of rain they had left for drier ground, and it was not till later that I came across any myself.

In the evening Hughes turned up on his way back from Dalbandin, and we spent a last evening together, I making the most of the society of the last white man I was likely to see, at anyrate before reaching Nasratabad.

A long march of thirty-one miles or thereabouts brought me to Dalbandin. The track led through collections of yellow sandhills, from which it would emerge here and there on to vast level stretches of sun-baked earth, over which it ran in an absolutely straight line far as the eye could see. The physical aspect of the country showed little change, though as we approached Dalbandin the Kharan hills receded to the south, and the Chargai hills came into view on the north. Technically the country through which the route passes cannot be described as a desert, there being sufficient grazing to support life—camel life at least—in many parts, and in a few places even a possibility of cultivation ; nor is it composed of the dreaded sea of yellow sand which constitutes the genuine desert, such as exists not very far north of the present trade-route ; but after a desert, I should imagine a country such as this, consisting of deserted tracts of sand, earth, or gravel, whose hideous monotony remains unbroken except by a vision of hills, mere excrescences apparently of the unvaried plain, is the most dreary and uninteresting to travel over.

Dalbandin may be described as the end of the first section of the road from Nushki, and bowing down before the god *dastur* (custom), in spite of their having had an easy time, I allowed the camels and men to halt in order that they could have no possible cause to grumble. The post differs little from others along the road, except that a bungalow for travellers has been erected, and the *thana*, which is a large one, contains a post-office. The water, which is good, is brought by a

karez from the hills on the north. I was not the only visitor on this occasion, for I found a horse-dealer on his way from Meshed with a string of sixty-five horses, who told me that he hoped to sell them at from 300 to 400 rupees (£20 to £27) apiece when he reached Quetta: eloquent testimony to the cheapness of horse-flesh in the vicinity of Meshed, for the horse-dealer of the East is no more likely to be found parting with his property under a handsome profit than is his *confrère* of the West. There was also a Persian gentleman on his way from Teheran to Calcutta, full of visions of profit in connection with Indo-Persian trade, and armed with letters of introduction from Major Chenevix Trench, British Consul at Nasratabad.

In the neighbourhood of the *thana* an attempt was being made to grow dates, and about a hundred young date-palms had, I was told, been planted; but whether the conditions which, according to the proverb, are necessary, that they must be grown with their feet in water and their heads in fire, will be realised, remains to be seen.

The weather, which ever since I had left Nushki had been most disagreeable, now became what I had been led to believe I should experience the whole way—cold and brilliant starlit nights, and cloudless skies by day. Indeed it was cold enough up to ten o'clock to make one look forward to the warmth of midday; but from then on to sunset it was as pleasant as one could wish, the sun's rays being quite hot enough in the middle of the day.

From Dalbandin the road led at times through ground broken by low ridges and mounds, at others over great plains of black gravel, where vegetation all but ceased, and then again over stretches of sand and stony ground, where tamarisk and dwarf palm grew. At Jujaki,

about thirty miles from Dalbandin, where I camped on the 27th, there was no *thana*, but a single shed, roughly built of unshaped stone, and used presumably as a shelter by the post-carriers and passing caravans. The water, too, was brackish; but having been informed of this before leaving Dalbandin, I had brought several skinfuls of sweet water with me, which was sufficient for drinking purposes till I reached good water again at Meroi.

Meroi, about twenty-one miles on, consists of a *thana* and bungalow, situated among some low bare hills, with stunted tamarisk and dwarf palm growing at the foot of them. Here, too, is a post-office, where the post-bag from Quetta to Sistan and *vice versâ* is opened, and letters can be posted and received. I was also able to obtain welcome supplies in the way of fowls and eggs from the *munshi* (postmaster) in charge, and barley and *atta* for the ponies and men.

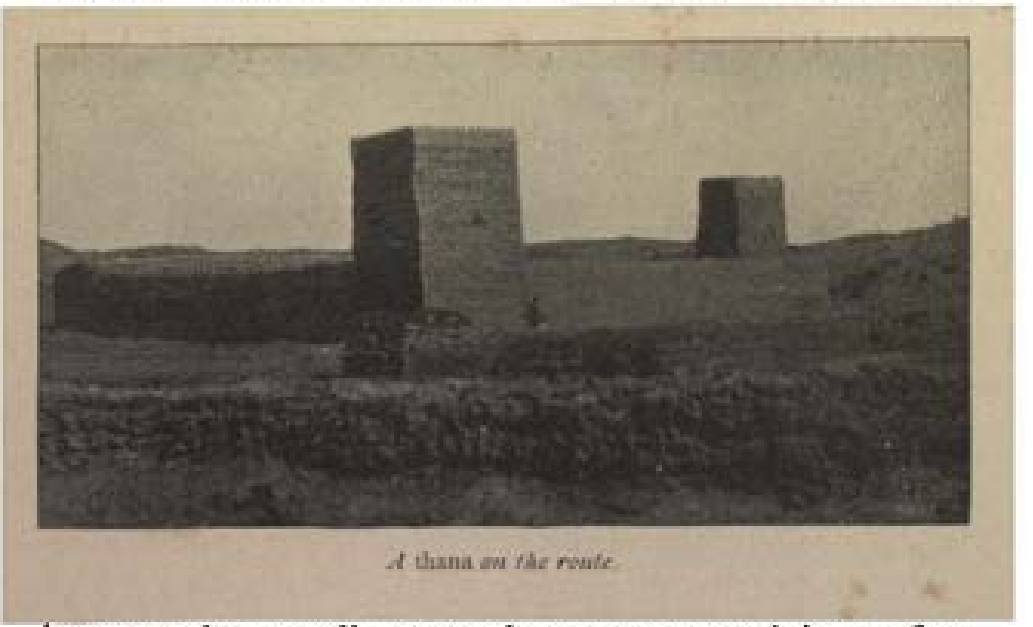
From Meroi the track lay through much the same sort of country, running at times between low ridges of barren hills, and across broad dips having the appearance of long-dried-up river-beds, where the tamarisk and dwarf palm flourished; at others over vast plains where vegetation ceased, and nothing was to be seen but huge expanses of black gravel and rock, parched and shimmering in the sun. As we approached Chah Sandan, our next camp, mountains appeared to the north, with jagged, broken outline of naked rock, standing out sharp and clear against the blue of the cloudless sky. At the end of a march of about twenty-one miles I found a somewhat dilapidated-looking *thana* by the roadside, in the midst of a level plain of stone and gravel, sparsely covered with stunted tamarisk and other dried-up scrub: not much to look at, and for the most part so burnt and withered as to be ready to fall to

dust at touch, but sufficient seemingly for the camels to graze on.

I was now 276 miles from Quetta, and halted on the 30th to rest the camels. The road, as will have been gathered, is a sufficiently dreary one, and little in the way of human life is to be met with: an occasional *kafilah*, travelling at slow monotonous pace towards Quetta; and now and then a *kafilah*, and sometimes a small company of men on camels or on foot, marching in the same direction as myself, the latter pilgrims for the most part on their way to the holy city of Meshed. Near Kuchaki Chah I had met a *kafilah* of about thirty camels from Sistan; at Yadgar Chah was a larger *kafilah* of Pathans, who had come from Herat through Sistan, with loads of dried fruit and other merchandise, and were on their way to Quetta. The horse-dealer at Dalbandin I have mentioned, and shortly before reaching Meroi I had come across a *kafilah* of from fifty to sixty camels from Sistan, also travelling east. One feature of every *kafilah*, and every collection of travellers that I came across, was noticeable, and that was that a certain number, if not the whole, of the party carried arms of some sort or another—precaution born of experience in these byways of the East—from rifles to huge scimitar-shaped swords. Frequently men were to be seen carrying guns of the most wonderful and obsolete pattern, and I could not help wondering who, in the event of their having to be discharged, would receive the greater damage, the man at the stock or the man at the muzzle-end!

From Chah Sandan to Tratoh, a distance of twenty-four miles, the road lay over a vast plain of black gravel, with a horizon on the south and west like the sea, but broken on the north by rocky hills. I found little to call for remark as I rode along this dreary

waste. Vegetation there was none; but here and there curious excrescences of sand caught the eye—low rounded mounds, sometimes in irregular patches, but more often in regular lines, looking from afar like chains of intrenchments, stretching across the plain. Beyond this nothing but miles and miles of black gravel, the dreary monotony of which was enhanced by a leaden sky overhead. Camp was pitched near a well of brackish water, and the *thana*, a rectangular enclosure of the usual mud bricks, divided



A thana on the route.

into two by a wall across the centre containing a few low and gloomy rooms in one half, the abode of a *daffidar* and a few *sowars*. Close to this enclosure a large circle of huge sacks, arranged in pairs, and the presence of recumbent forms wrapped up in huge *poshteens* (sheepskin coats), which on closer inspection proved to be sleeping humanity, indicated the presence of a *kafilah*, and the number of sacks, that it consisted of thirty or forty camels. "Sistanis on their way to Quetta with loads of wool," was the answer to my inquiries.

Rain came on soon after midday, and continued steadily till 10 P.M., when it ceased, leaving a cold white mist, which hung like a pall over Tratoh as I left on the morning of the 2nd. It turned out to be quite local, however, and I soon cantered out of it into a clear and cloudless atmosphere beyond. The same level plain lay before me, losing itself in an unbounded horizon to the south, but still broken by low rocky hills on the north. Far away to the south-west a low range of hills became visible, appearing a dull blue-grey through the dim haze of distance, while to the right of them rested what I took to be a small white cloud on the edge of the plain. As we got farther west, however, far from being a fleecy white cloud, it resolved itself into a glittering snow-clad peak, which on inquiry I found to be the Koh-i-Tuftan, a peak of 12,681 feet, on the Perso-Balooch border. The absence of vegetation was again noticeable during the day; but at Koondi, twenty-two miles from Tratoh, sand was again in evidence, and the ground was covered with a low scrub growing in tufts, and called by my Baloochis *ktrart*. One would imagine from its dusty burned-up appearance that it was anything but palatable; but the camels seemed to find it good enough.

To the north rose the Koh-i-Sultan, a peak or rather a collection of peaks, with jagged, serrated outline, looked upon by my *sowars* with a certain superstitious awe. There, they told me, sheltered beneath the highest peak, rested the tomb of one, Sultan Shah, a former king. Stories were told of certain Pathans who had made their way to the tomb, and who, after many days of prayer and fasting, had been rewarded for their devotion by the stones of the mountain-side rolling away and laying bare before their astonished eyes gold and other

precious minerals. "But," they added, "there is no water in the mountain or anywhere near, which makes it a difficult place to get to." Sulphur no doubt exists in the neighbourhood, for they showed me a piece they had picked up close by, and they also talked of lead and "stones of indigo." To the south were huge stretches of what appeared to be water shimmering in the midday sun, but which were in reality nothing but level stretches of *shora*-covered soil converted

The well at Mashki Chah.

by the dancing mirage into the likeness of great sheets of water.

There is little that calls for remark on the road from Koondi to Mashki Chah, my next camp. Close to Koondi stunted tamarisk was again to be seen; but these were soon left behind, and the road resumed its monotonous course over plains of stone and gravel. Towards the end of the day's march it approached a low range of hills, whose gaunt ribs of rock projected through masses of sand, and shortly before reaching

camp we were winding about among low hills of sand and gravel at the foot of the range. Mashki Chah consists of a well and *thana*, and a few palm-trees, surrounded by rocky peaks, rising in fantastic shapes from the low range at the foot of which it is situated, and taking into consideration the nature of the country which encompasses it on every side, one might be forgiven for considering it almost picturesque.

From here the first few miles led over ground broken by low hills and ridges; but before long we were again travelling over a level plain, skirting a low range of hills on the north. A distance of some miles over the level, with nothing to afford relief to the eye wearied with continual scenes of dreary desolation, and we again entered a maze of low mounds and ridges, among which we twisted and turned till we reached the wells and small mud shelter of Ware Chah. My transport camels, which had left Mashki Chah between ten and eleven o'clock the previous evening, arrived just as I did at one o'clock: a fair illustration of the rate of progress which one may count upon one's baggage animals attaining.

From local information I gathered that wild asses used to roam over the plains in this neighbourhood in considerable numbers, but that the advent of the caravan-route had driven them away, and they had been rarely seen in the vicinity of late. They were, however,—so my informant gave me to understand,—still to be found in fair numbers not far from Kirtaka, —a post on the route three days' journey farther on,— and he knew of two having been shot during the last month. I asked what they did with them when they shot them, and was told that they of course ate them. Of course! What else should they do? It is only

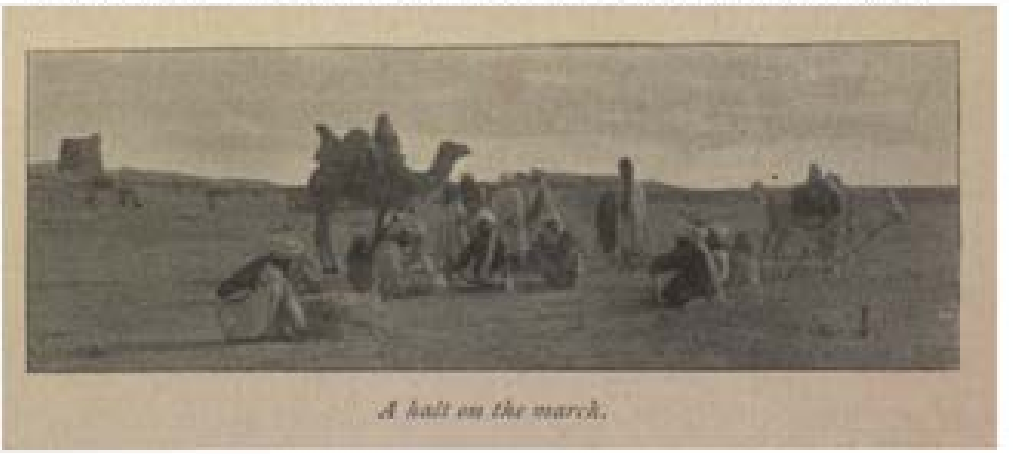
the sahib who is fool enough to take the trouble to shoot things for any other reason!

From Ware Chah the road differed little from the previous march, though leading through a country more uniformly hilly as it drew towards the Sainduk Mountains and the Persian border. To the south the twin peaks of the Koh-i-Tuftan rose sharp and clear, glittering with their mantle of snow, in the glare of the midday sun. The corpses of two camels by the wayside in a state of rapid decomposition, and already but little removed from gaunt white skeletons, seemed but a fitting adjunct to the dreary and forbidding aspect of the country, which forced itself upon our attention, for a distance of twenty-three miles, till the *thana* of Makak karez, becoming suddenly visible round a corner, proclaimed the day's march at an end. The water-supply here is brought, as the name of the place implies, by means of a *karez* from some hills near by, and it was a relief to find that it was sweet, for at the last four stages it had been very salt. I had been prepared for brackish water at Tratoh and Koondi, and had made arrangements accordingly, carrying water for two days from Chah Sandan; but the water at Mashki Chah and Ware Chah was supposed to be sweet, and I can only account for its being so salt when I was there as a result of having been stirred up by the recent rains. Anyway, two days of salt water, salt tea, salt soup, and salt everything else, was quite enough, and I was very glad to be drinking fresh water again in place of the nasty unpalatable stuff of the last two days. I found a *kafiluh* from Meshed resting here when I arrived, carrying loads of wool, almonds, and dried fruit to the more paying market at Quetta.

A ride of eleven miles brought me to Sainduk, at the

foot of the mountains on the Persian border, where I found a well and spacious rectangular courtyard, containing at one end eight or nine rooms, including a post-office. On all sides bare hills rose up in rugged irregular shapes, streaked with odd seams of colour, from brick red and salmon pink to purple and sombre black.

Both men and beasts were ready for a rest, so I halted here on the 7th. Not far from the *thana* stood a few huts, the first thing I had seen in the way of a village on the road since leaving Mull, and among the



A halt on the march.

inhabitants was a man who had the reputation of being a shikarie. He told me there were "gud" (the oorial of India) on the hills close by, and that he had seen two males only the day before. He also said there were ibex in the hills farther on, so I sent him off to see if he could find any, telling him to join me again at my next camp.

The road from Sainduk to Kirtaka—seventeen miles—lay for the first few miles among the hills of a spur projecting from the main range, whence it emerged on to the edge of a vast plain—the skirts of the real desert, which lies to the north-east. Along the fringe

of this plain, and skirting the hills on the west, it ran in a north-westerly direction to Kirtaka, the usual building on the edge of a patch of yellow grass. The shikarie from Sainduk reached my camp in the evening, having seen nothing but small ibex, not worth shooting, so I continued my journey next day. It was a repetition of the previous march, the road still running in a north-westerly direction along the foot of the mountains to Mohammed Reza Chah.

From here a vile apology for a road pursued its way along the foot of the hills, from which great furrows ran down to the plain, cutting the track at right angles, and giving it the appearance of an angry sea, troubled by a heavy ground-swell, more than anything else. Along this we walked and cantered alternately whenever the latter form of progress was possible, and at the end of a couple of hours came upon a *kafilah* of seventy or eighty camels, bringing loads of wool and almonds from Meshed. Another hour of uninterrupted going and a large white stone became visible, standing upright on the plain about 100 yards from the track. At this point three countries meet,—Baloochistan, Persia, and Afghanistan,—the forbidden lands of his Highness Abdur Rahman Khan stretching away to the north-east.[1] A few hundred yards beyond this the road left its course along the foot of the mountains and entered them, winding thence amongst the precipitous cliffs and jagged peaks of the many-coloured Koh-i-Malek Siah till it reached Killa Robat on the Perso-Balooch boundary. The *thana* here was a substantial one, and a bungalow, then being

[1] This was what my escort told me, though I believe the actual meeting-point of the three countries is on the summit of a peak close by.

built, should very soon be ready for the accommodation of travellers. I found a *kafilah*, also from Meshed, carrying loads similar to the one I had already passed on the road.

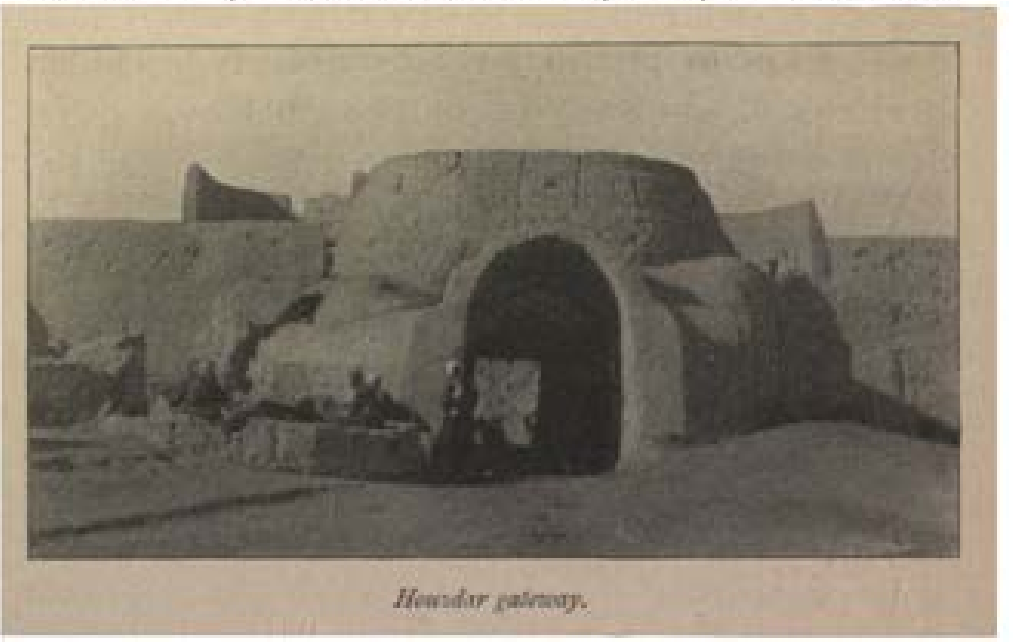
Halting a day at Robat, I left for Hormak on the 12th by a road taking a fairly level course through the Koh-i-Malek Siah, keeping just on the Persian side of the boundary, and running now due north. Occasionally glimpses of the real desert to the east could be seen through openings in the hills, but otherwise there was little of interest, and an uneventful march of seventeen miles brought us to camp, pitched on the edge of a large patch of tamarisk-jungle, and close to some springs of excellent water. From Hormak the road took us down a dried-up river-bed, and emerging from the mountains, led over a huge stony plain, with an unbounded horizon on the north and east. Some miles on sand took the place of stone, and stunted tamarisk sprang up all round. At one place we came to a fair-sized stretch of water; but beyond this there was nothing to mark time or distance, and we reached camp at Nowad Chah after a march of about twenty-four miles. This is a new well, dug within the last few weeks, to shorten the long march to Girdi Thana, and a small domed mud house had also been erected.

Girdi Thana is not far from Nowad Chah, probably not more than six or seven miles, and the road, or rather track, connecting them lies over an absolute level, covered plentifully with tamarisk. From here, dotted all over the plain, are to be seen the remains of ancient cities, all deserted and fallen into decay. I visited one within a couple of miles of camp, and found walls and the lower parts of houses standing;

but the whole had the appearance of having been long deserted, owing to the domes having all fallen in, and to drifts of sand having been blown against the walls. From the latter I could see with my glasses any number of similar ruins dotted over the plain in every direction, some of which have, I believe, been deserted for many years. My escort told me that the villages all round had been deserted for over two hundred years; but though some have undoubtedly been deserted as long and longer, I have good reason to believe that the majority were left by the inhabitants owing to changes in the course of the Helmund depriving them of their water-supply about thirty-five years ago. The early history of many must date back for centuries, for coins and seals of Greek and Assyrian times are dug up by the natives, and legend credits them with being the birthplace of Rustam, greatest hero of Persian myth.

From Girdi Thana to Asak Chah, a march of twenty-two miles, the track lies over the same interminable plain, with an unbounded horizon on all sides, except where the thin line of the Koh-i-Malek Siah is still visible to the south. As we got farther, vegetation became thinner and scarcer, till at times we were traversing huge wastes of soil, hard and smooth as asphalt, which extended as far as the eye could see in every direction. About fifteen miles on we came to a large deserted village, in a state of fair preservation, called Houzdar. Some of the upper stories of the houses were still standing, and from one of these I obtained a view over the whole village, a mass of broken-down and decaying domes and walls. The outside walls were intact, and still in a state

of sufficient preservation to prevent any one walking into the city except by the single gate. All round in every direction could be seen similar remains, and Houzdar must in days gone by have been a place of considerable size and importance. At Asak Chah I met a number of nomad shepherds with large flocks of sheep, sign that I was on the fringe of a more inhabitable country. The headman among them told me that they wandered over the plain pasturing their



Houzdar gateway.

sheep, which, he said, numbered between 4000 and 5000; but it is possible that his capacity for counting in double figures was limited.

Leaving camp at 9 A.M. the next morning, we made for some low hills which rose from the plain, and a few miles on I was met by Sirdar Sayed Khan, a Balooch chief of the neighbourhood, with a following of about a dozen mounted men, and also by two *sowars* of Jacob's Horse, sent out by Major Trench to escort me in. After the usual exchange of compliments, we rode on to Sayed

Khan's *khel* (village), about ten miles from Asak Chah, where I found my tents pitched, and shortly afterwards the chief paid me a visit in my tent. Knowing something of the customs of the country, I had tea and tobacco ready for him, and as he could only talk Persian and Baloochi, sat down to the interview with Ralmat Khan as interpreter. At the end of half an hour I brought the interview to a close by thanking him for the arrangements he had made for my journey from Robat, and presented him with a small present for the trouble he had taken to make my journey through his part of the country easy and comfortable.

In appearance he is a fine-looking man, intelligent, and able to talk upon various subjects, and having devoted his services to the British, has proved most useful in looking after the track from Robat to Nasratabad. The wells and shelters I had come across on this section of the trade-route had been built by him, and among other things, he supplies men to carry the mail-bag from Sistan to Birjand, there being at present no regular postal service between the two places. He spoke in terms of the highest praise of the work done by Trench in the furtherance of trade and the prosperity of the people; but when I asked him about the Russian vice-consul, he affected complete ignorance, saying that he did not even know his name. This though the Russian had then been living at Nasratabad for nearly a year!

The Amir of Sistan had sent out his mules to help me over the last twenty miles that lay between myself and his capital, a kindness which I greatly appreciated when I saw what sort of a road it was that led up to the chief town in Sistan, and still more when I learnt

that his own private mules were the only ones in the country. The whole face of the country changed these last twenty miles: instead of a dry waterless plain, it became a plain intersected with ditches and canals, covered with low scrub jungle, and with pools of water, making travelling anything but pleasant; for with the exception of one or two lately made by Trench, there were no bridges, and the canals being often deep, wettings were unpleasantly frequent. Villages were dotted about over the plain, differing little from the ruined specimens I had already seen, with the exception of being inhabited.

A few miles out from Nasratabad Trench met me, escorted by two *sowars* of Jacob's Horse, carrying a small union-jack on a lance. A little farther on the low houses of a mud town became visible on the horizon, and in a short time we were winding in and out through tortuous and narrow lanes, between the small and irregularly built houses of Husseinabad, the southern portion of the capital. From narrow alleys we emerged on to a graveyard unenclosed in any way, and spread out like a carpet in front of the Russian vice-consul's house. Before us rose the walls of Nasratabad, the northern city, and to the east stretched the unbounded plain. Here a few hundred yards from the town, under the shadow of the union-jack, flying from a 30-foot flagstaff, was to be seen a neatly laid-out settlement, the home of the English consul and his staff. My journey for the time being was at an end, and I looked forward with pleasure to a rest in Sistan, ready to appreciate to the full the companionship of a fellow-countryman, and the comforts and luxuries of a fixed abode, after many days of solitary marching over the stony wastes of inhospitable Baloochistan.

LIST OF MARCHES BETWEEN QUETTA AND NASRATABAD AND THE APPROXIMATE DISTANCES.

		Miles.
1.	Quetta to Girdi Talab	16
2.	Girdi Talab to Karnak	16
3.	Karnak to Kardgap	26
4.	Kardgap to Kishingi	24
5.	Kishingi to Nushki	11
6.	Nushki to Mull	25
7.	Mull to Padag	30
8.	Padag to Yadgar Chah	24
9.	Yadgar Chah to Dalbandin . . .	31
10.	Dalbandin to Jujaki	30
11.	Jujaki to Meroi	21
12.	Meroi to Chah Sandan	21
13.	Chah Sandan to Tratoh	24
14.	Tratoh to Kundi	22
15.	Kundi to Mashki Chah	22
16.	Mashki Chah to Ware Chah . . .	26
17.	Ware Chah to Makak Karez . . .	23
18.	Makak Karez to Sainduk . . .	11
19.	Sainduk to Kirtaka	17
20.	Kirtaka to Chah Mohammed Reza . .	17
21.	Chah Mohammed Reza to Killa Robat .	28
22.	Killa Robat to Hormak	17
23.	Hormak to Nowad Chah . . .	24
24.	Nowad Chah to Girdi Thana . . .	7
25.	Girdi Thana to Asak Chah . . .	22
26.	Asak Chah to Sayed Khan's *khel* . .	10
27.	Sayed Khan's *khel* to Nasratabad . .	20
	Quetta to Nasratabad . .	565

CHAPTER III.

NASRATABAD AND ITS NOBILITY.

Climate to be expected on the route—Facilities for travelling—First impressions of the capital—Husseinabad—Nasratabad—An Indian trader—Trenchabad—The Russian Vice-Consul—Mir Ali Akbar, Amir of Sistan—Celebrating the Czar's birthday—An exciting dinner-party—Present from the Amir—Mir Mausum Khan, the *sartip*—Mohammed Reza Khan, the *sarhang*—Sirdar Purdil Khan and Mir Abbas—Other sojourners in the land.

I HAVE now described the journey from Quetta to Sistan, a description which is of necessity somewhat tedious, owing to the monotonous sameness of the country through which the route passes, and the utter absence of any object of interest in its physical conformation. Attractions for the ordinary traveller there are none, it being much more likely that his predominant feelings would be those of repulsion from a route where the one object one grows to look and long for is the small white speck on the horizon which slowly resolves itself into a tent, proclaiming the end of the day's march to be at hand.

But what is wanting in physical attraction is made up for by the interest afforded in speculating as to the political, strategical, and commercial future of the route, which, considering its more than probable value, looked at from a commercial point of view alone, has until quite recently been sadly neglected.

It is to the merchant undoubtedly that the route must appeal most strongly at present, dangling as it does before his eager eyes visions of fortunes waiting to be gathered; but hand in hand with the merchant will be found the politician, and that the results of the bridge thus raised between India and Persia, across the Gulf of Baloochistan, will penetrate beyond its present terminus is scarcely open to doubt.

I have endeavoured to show that the journey from Quetta can—thanks to the admirable way in which Captain Webb Ware, the officer in charge of the route, has carried out his *duties*—be performed with ease and comparative comfort, that supplies are forthcoming at all the larger posts, and that water and grazing exist for camels at every stage. The climate is in the winter, as a rule, fine and dry, cold at nights and in the early mornings, with a warm sun in the middle of the day, and it is in winter that caravans at present travel over it; but I am assured by those who ought to know, that though the heat in the daytime is very considerable, there is no reason why caravans (who prefer travelling by night when feasible) should not find the route in every respect as satisfactory a one in summer as in winter. The total rainfall is very small, and for some years has not averaged more than a few inches, which makes cultivation impossible except in selected spots in the vicinity of the mountains, where artificial irrigation is possible by means of *karezes*; and it is for this reason that the country over which the route passes has the appearance of a deserted and uninhabited waste, such villages as there are being situated at the foot of the mountains, and as far removed as possible from the dead stretches of unproductive plain. As far as Dalbandin there should be no difficulty

about supplies, even when the traffic becomes far greater than it is at present, as local cultivation should be possible the length of this section; but from Dalbandin to Sainduk cultivation would hardly be possible, and supplies will have to be brought from Nushki and the Nushki-Dalbandin section, and for the latter half of this section from Mirjawa and the country round it on the Persian border, where I was told there was cultivation and cultivatable land in plenty. With so fertile a country as Sistan within a few days' march, no anxiety need be felt on account of supplies for the remainder of the journey.

Having reached, after many days of marching across such arid wastes as I have described, the capital of little-known Sistan, one's first impression is that there is little to see and still less to rouse one's interest in the tumble-down dilapidated mud city, which has the appearance of having been dropped down haphazard in the middle of a vast and cheerless plain. The entire absence of roads, the untidy and neglected appearance of Husseinabad, the southern town through which one rides on entering the capital from the south, the narrow winding lanes which serve for streets, and the total want of method displayed in the arrangement of the low-domed houses, which stand together in irregular clumps, all tend to produce a feeling of disappointment on one's first glimpse of the capital.

Ancient history speaks of the country as populous and with many cities under the Sufari dynasty in the ninth century; but since that time the country has suffered from a succession of ills, and, under the heavy hand of an adverse fate, has fallen from its former state of prosperity and greatness. The destructive genius of Jengiz Khan the Mongol, who in the thirteenth century swept across Asia with fire and sword, leaving

in his wake an indelible trail of ruin and desolation; the overwhelming hordes of Timur the Tartar a century later; the invasion of the Afghan in the eighteenth century, followed by their expulsion by Nadir Shah, have been the means of crushing with cruel persistency the claims and aspirations of Sistan to the independence and wealth to which its former state of prosperity might justly have given rise. Perhaps with the dawn of the twentieth century a new era of prosperity is in store, under the civilising influence of the West.[1]

The present capital and seat of what the Persians are pleased to call government consists of two towns, or rather of a town divided into two parts — the southern half, known locally as Husseinabad, and the northern, which is entirely surrounded by high city walls, and known as Nasratabad. Beyond these two towns have sprung up in the last few months the neat buildings of the British Consulate, which may be said to constitute a third part of the capital, and which I

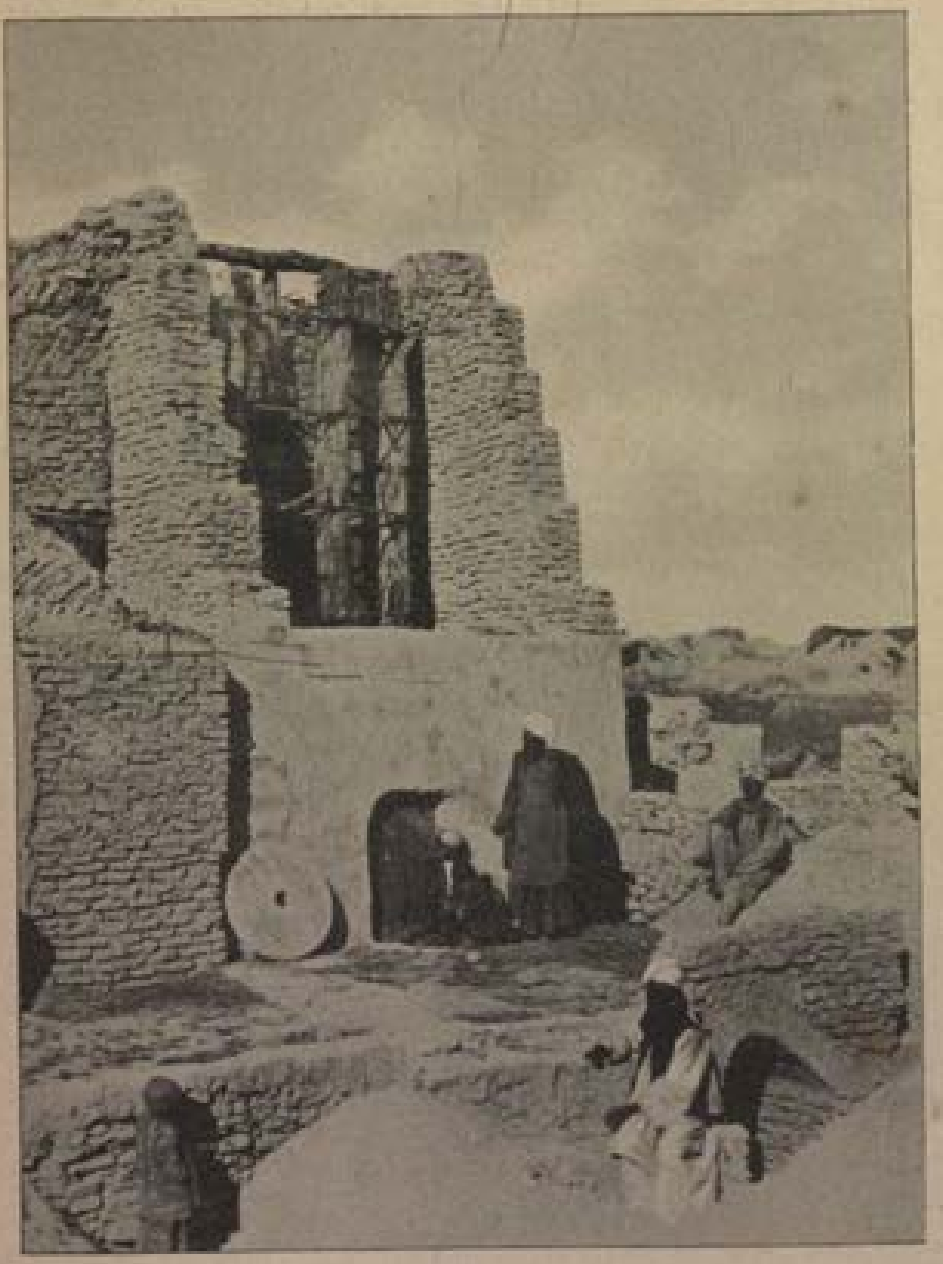
[1] According to Malleson, the probable date of Jengiz Khan's birth was about the year 1155. Some idea of his character is to be derived from the following paragraph in Malleson's 'Afghanistan,' describing his early struggle for mastery over the hordes of his own turbulent people: "He finally established his supremacy by two acts. The first was his complete defeat of his rivals on the field of battle, with an army counting only one-fourth of theirs; the second a deed of atrocious cruelty with which he crowned his victory. It is asserted that having taken many prisoners, he prepared eighty huge cauldrons, filled them with boiling water, and into them cast his still living captives."

Timur the Tartar, the devastator of a century later, appears to have been as great a scourge as was his predecessor, and is described by Malleson as follows: "Taimur, known also in history as Tamerlane, was born at Kesh, near Samarkand, about the year 1336. . . . Taimur possessed very much the same organising genius as Chingiz Khan, from whom in the female line he was descended. He almost equalled him in ferocity, and surpassed him in perfidy, whilst his aims, if as large, were at least as reckless."

For a concise summary of the leading landmarks of the history of Sistan from legendary to modern times, see Curzon's 'Persia,' vol. i., ch. ix.

heard talked of on all sides as Trenchabad—*i.e.*, the city of Trench.

Husseinabad, as I have already mentioned, is little more than a collection of small-domed mud houses, built irrespective of ground-plan, wheresoever fancy dictated, in the middle of a vast plain. Here and there a windmill of curious shape stands up conspicuous among the surrounding houses, usually stationary in the winter months, but wanting only the fierce blasts of the "Bad-i-sad-o-bist roz," or wind of a hundred and twenty days, which blows unceasingly throughout the summer months, to rouse it to a state of wild activity. Beyond this the houses of the Russian vice-consul and the head mullah are the only other objects likely to attract one's attention. The former, though perhaps the largest house in the town, is badly situated, being shut in on three sides by houses, and on the fourth by a graveyard, which stretches from the Consulate to the walls of Nasratabad, and extension, or the making of grounds such as a garden round his house, would under the present circumstances be impossible. A graveyard, too, spread out up to one's front door can hardly be said to constitute a pleasant or desirable outlook, though an understanding has, I believe, been come to between M. Miller, the Russian vice-consul, and the Amir, to the effect that the graveyard shall remain *in statu quo*, and that henceforth all burials shall take place in another portion of ground on the outskirts of Husseinabad. The house itself is rectangular, enclosing two courtyards opening into one another, and rejoices in an upper storey, an uncommon if not unique form of building in a city of pure and unadulterated mud. A cluster of domes—each room requiring a separate dome—forms the roof, above which stands a sorry-looking flagstaff; for except on Sundays



WINDMILL IN HUSSEINABAD.

and festivals I never saw it graced with a flag, though this is probably due to a laudable economy rather than to doubts as to the toleration of the people, inspired by certain beings great in the land in the early days of the Consulate.

Nasratabad, the northern town, though little to boast of, is by far the more imposing of the two, being enclosed by high walls, about 350 yards in length from north to south and 400 from east to west, with buttresses at intervals of about 40 yards. An additional rectangular enclosure, projecting from the north-east corner, contains the arc or citadel, in which is situated the palace of the Amir. In the centre of the southern wall stands one of the two gateways of the city, supported on each side by a buttress, and from here the central street runs the length of the city, terminating in a similar gateway in the centre of the north wall.

Though scarcely in a state of repair that would satisfy the critical eye of a modern town council, the view from the gateway is quaint and picturesque: a high dome rising over points where the main street is cut by cross-roads, while the living part of the picture is represented by an ever-changing scene of mixed humanity—Persian, Afghan, and wild Balooch—varied by horses ridden and led, and miniature donkeys half buried under loads out of all proportion to their size.

With a single exception the houses and shops on either side of the street are small and insignificant, the latter hardly recognisable as such, owing to their apparent innocence of goods for sale; while the owner is content to sit in front of his door in a state of apathetic indolence, typical of all things, great and small, from the highest to the lowest, throughout the dominions of his Highness Mozuffer-a-Din Shah.

The exception to which I have referred is a commo-

dious and well-built shop, midway between the south and north gates of the city, where goods of European manufacture of all sorts and kinds included under the general heading of piece goods are sold by an individual who, as far as this branch of his business at anyrate is concerned, corresponds to the general dealer of the West. The history of the appearance in the midst of an absolutely oriental city of a purveyor of

Main Street, Nasratabad.

European furniture, ladies' boots and shoes, and other equally unexpected articles, is shortly as follows. Towards the end of the year 1899, Seth Suleiman, a Shiah Mohammedan of the *borah* or trading class, of the firm of Ali Mohammed, merchants trading at Quetta, announced his intention of taking goods by the new Nushki route, with a view to exploiting the trade of Sistan. According to his own account he left Quetta amid the jeers and ironical good wishes of his

sceptical fellow-traders, and travelling by the newly opened trade-route, reached Nasratabad with goods to the value of 20,000 rupees (£1333). He seems to have experienced the same feelings of disappointment as I did on seeing for the first time the capital of the country and centre of all his cherished hopes, and confesses that he was struck somewhat forcibly and unpleasantly with the thought that there might after all be very good grounds for the scepticism expressed on his departure from Quetta as to the probable profits of trade in these remote parts, whose chief town was such a dilapidated and insignificant collection of mud huts. For some time he was even unwilling to open his cases, which the suspicious people believed to contain arms for a sudden *coup* to be made upon their country; but was finally persuaded to do so by Mohammed Reza Khan, the *sarhang*, at that time deputy governor of Sistan for his father, Mir Ali Akbar, Hashmat-ul-Mulk, who was residing at Tabbas, the other province of which he was governor. From this time on, though much hampered at first by the suspicion of the people and their unwillingness to sell him their produce for export, by the trying summer climate, and the difficulty he experienced in travelling about the country in making himself known to the people, his business has progressed by leaps and bounds, till he is now not only the proud possessor of the finest shop in the capital,—which is emptied of its goods far quicker than he is able to fill it from the distant markets of India,—and of a separate house where he lives himself, but has also a practical monopoly of the exports of the country, which, despite heavy transport charges, realise a large profit in the Quetta market, and but a portion of which he is able to buy up for want of capital. That he will thus mono-

polise the trade for long is hardly likely, and it is fairly safe to prophesy that the present high price of European goods will before long be reduced by the presence of other competitors.

In addition to Nasratabad and Husseinabad, there remains the more modern part of the town, which I have already spoken of as Trenchabad. Separated from the rest of the city by a *maidan* (stretch of level ground) of some acres, it occupies an admirable

Mosque at Trenchabad.

site, and has the advantage of room for extension, should it at any time be thought advisable to embark upon enlargement. Between two rows of buildings is a wide space, more nearly a square than a street, at one end of which flies the union-jack from a flagstaff planted in a solidly-built pedestal of mud. Behind the main block of buildings on the south side of the square are one or two other buildings, the most interesting of which is a mosque, if only from the fact of its having been built by an

Englishman. The main buildings cover a space of about 150 yards by 70 yards, the whole site consisting roughly of about 13 acres; and when it is considered that the whole of the buildings, including the consul's house, guard-room, cavalry lines, staff and servants' quarters, mosque and all, were completed for a sum of 2500 rupees (£166), Trenchabad may probably claim to be the cheapest town on record!

Such was the city I found in December 1900, which in the space of a twelvemonth had been roused from the state of torpor of a true home of the Orient—untouched by the influence of Western progress, where time stands still and change is unknown—to the surprising fact that there were worlds beyond its own, and people of an alien race who had stirred them, vastly to their own amazement, to a state of—to their ideas—extraordinary activity.

The day after my arrival I called on M. Miller, the Russian vice-consul, whom I found most cordial and agreeable, speaking English exceedingly well, and, as I afterwards found out, a fluent master of the language of the country, an acquirement of the greatest importance to any one entertaining hopes of dealing successfully with the Persian. Later in the afternoon I paid a visit in state to the Amir, who rejoices in the title of Hashmat-ul-Mulk, or glory of the country (!), and the spectacle of the British consul and myself—the former in full uniform, while I had donned black frock-coat and patent leather boots—riding solemnly through the narrow alleys of the crumbling mud city, accompanied by a full escort of Pathan *sowars*, must have been one well calculated to inspire laughter, had any one capable of appreciating the humour of the situation been present to witness it.

Having entered a walled enclosure in front of the Amir's palace, where were to be seen prisoners bent and groaning under chains and irons of the most appalling size and weight, and having acknowledged the salute of a ragged-looking cut-throat with a gun, presumably one of the much-talked-of army on sentry duty, we dismounted, and were forthwith ushered into the presence of the governor. The reception-hall was large for Sistan, and might have been 18 or 20 feet in length by perhaps 10 or 12 in breadth, with a recess in one side containing a fireplace, in front of which were placed a table and three or four chairs. The only ornamentation on the mud walls was a dado of cretonne, and on the table was a cloth of bright yellow cotton with a deep border of gaudy red roses. Overhead could be seen the funnel of a *bad-gir* or air-shaft for catching the wind in the hot weather.

On entering, the Amir, a pleasant-looking man of medium height with black beard and moustache, rose to meet us, and having welcomed us with courtly bow and stately hand-shake, motioned us to seats on either side of the table, and with the greatest solemnity and deliberation then took a seat between us. Pausing a moment—a Persian is never in a hurry—to be sure that we were seated, he made the polite *inquiry* never omitted, asking if we were well; and answers having been given and similar demands for information as to the state of health of the ruler having been made, preliminaries were at an end, and we were at liberty to talk on any subject that might suggest itself.

The garment worn by his Highness—a long baggy coat of Kashmir shawl-work, fastened across the chest with cord and frogs—bore a strong and unfortunate resemblance to a dressing-gown; but when I realised that it was the very latest robe of office received from

the Shah, which he had donned in honour of his English guest, I endeavoured to banish from my mind the impressions created by the mere outward appearance of the garment, and to bear in mind only its significance as an emblem of majesty. Once in every year the Shah sends to all provincial governors a *khelat* or present of a robe of office, signifying his approval of their governorship, and thereby granting them permission to retain office for another year. It is perhaps hardly necessary to state that the lucky recipient of the royal *khelat* has to pay a sum at least equivalent to its value in money to the bearer of the gift: a simple and easy method thus presenting itself of rewarding any official to whom the Shah may be indebted, in appointing him the bearer of the royal *khelat*.

During the interview, tea, *kalian* (the hubble-bubble of India and hookah of Turkey and Egypt), cigarettes, and coffee were brought in at intervals, a form of hospitality which is liable to become a trifle trying if more than one visit be paid during the day.

Owing to my inability to speak the language the brunt of the conversation devolved upon Trench, and was for the most part confined to generalities. The Amir spoke of Teheran and Meshed, both of which places he had visited, and was quite familiar with the idea of railways and similar innovations of civilisation; and though his knowledge of such subjects rested on the single example of a line the country can boast of,—the light railway from Teheran to the mosque of Shah Abdul Azim, a distance of a few miles only,—he spoke with assurance of the advantage of a line from Quetta to Robat, which he looked upon as a certain production of the near future: indeed I heard the advent of a line along the new trade-route discussed with much more certainty by the higher class Sistanis, who look

upon the question of its ultimate construction as in no way open to doubt, than I did at the Quetta-Nushki end of the route.

On rising to take my leave at the end of half an hour, and expressing my pleasure at having made his acquaintance, he bowed us to the door, and terminated the audience with true oriental politeness by expressing a wish that my shadow might never grow less.

Meeting him casually like this, one receives the impression of a quiet, dignified, gentlemanly man, content to live quietly as the ruler of his province, and desiring only to be left in peace and quiet. Though ostensibly an Anglophile, he is shrewd enough where his own interests are concerned, and stands in wholesome awe of his superior at Meshed, who, as he well knows, is under the sinister influence of Russia. Though willing to assist British interests, therefore, as far as he considers compatible with his own safety, he could hardly be relied on to take any very active part in the furtherance of British trade and prestige as long as there is a possibility of its being reported against him at Meshed through the agency of the Russian vice-consul, his policy being strongly flavoured with a desire to please both parties; and he may be looked upon as a friend and ally insomuch as he will continue to show such signs of friendship towards Great Britain as will not endanger his own position.

In the well-mannered and courtly gentleman that I met there was nothing of the savage to be seen; but that such a side of his nature, savouring of the barbarians of old, does lie dormant beneath the surface, and that it is capable of being roused, is demonstrated by the fact that a short time before my arrival he had, with the unrestrained licence of an absolute despot, resorted to the barbarous practice of blowing a criminal

from the muzzle of a gun! The individual who lit the fuse, thus ushering the wretched man—a robber caught on the borders of Afghanistan—unceremoniously into eternity, received the magnificent reward of six krans, equivalent in English money to half-a-crown!

On my return to the Consulate after my visit to the Amir I found an invitation from the Russian vice-consul to dinner on December the 6th, in honour of the Czar's birthday, and an intimation that the official reception would begin at 10 A.M. Allowing for the thirteen days which Russia, for no very well-ascertained reason, persists in lagging behind the rest of Europe, the invitation was issued, according to modern dates, for the 19th, and at 10 A.M. we proceeded to the Russian Consulate to offer our congratulations. M. Miller in full uniform received us most cordially, insisting on our partaking of refreshments of sherbet, tea, and lemonade in the intervals between cigarettes and conversation, and when we at length rose to leave to make room for others, added a hearty verbal invitation to the written one we had already received, reminding us to return at eight o'clock.

It was generally known that preparations for a grand dinner in honour of the occasion had been in progress for a long time, and that all the Persians of rank and position had been invited to come for the first time by a European host to a European dinner. Rumour, however, was prevalent during the day that the Amir had refused, on the grounds that he never went out at nights, that the gates of the city were always closed at sunset, and that he could not depart from this recognised custom. He furthermore gave it to be understood that any one who chose to attend the dinner could spend the night outside, as the gates would not be unlocked before the customary hour of

sunrise. Of the persons of importance who dwelt without the city walls, the chief, Mir Mausum Khan, the *sartip*, and son of the Amir, was not on speaking terms with the vice-consul, owing chiefly to the latter having refused to pay the first call when he came to Nasratabad from Birjand, where he had been living for some time with his uncle, the Shankat-ul-Mulk, governor of Kain; so that though hoping to see a gathering of Persians who would be experiencing for the first time the customs and etiquette of a European dinner, such as the use of knives and forks, &c., I was not altogether unprepard to find that when we assembled at eight o'clock the only other guests besides ourselves were a Russian naturalist and friend, who had reached Sistan the day before I had.

After dinner we adjourned to the courtyard, which was brilliantly illuminated with Chinese lanterns and miniature lights produced by lighted wicks floating in oil in small clay cups of local manufacture, and were given a display of Sistani dancing to the accompaniment of a medley of jarring discords on tom-tom, pipe, and horn. While the monotonous movements common to oriental dancing were in progress, fireworks—also of local manufacture—were let off in the background, the majority consisting of a form of rocket. Things soon became exciting, for the Sistani, ignorant of, or at any-rate ignoring, the scientific methods of the pyrotechnist of the West, was content to fire the rocket in his hand, and was supremely indifferent as to which direction it might take. The consequence was that while a portion of them took an upward course after the manner of all well-conducted rockets, by far the greater number went whizzing about in all directions, rebounding from the walls of the courtyard, skimming along the ground, and exploding among the polyglot

crowd of onlookers, to the huge delight of the perpetrators of the mischief.

When the *tamasha* was at its height, when the discordant symphony of the musicians was punctuated by the hiss and scream of countless rockets, when the dancers had danced themselves into a state of frenzied activity, the crowning event of the entertainment was ushered on to the scene from a little-expected corner. The cook in the exuberance of his spirits, and for sheer fun of the thing, pranced on to the roof, and in a fit of drunken hilarity discharged all six chambers of a loaded revolver! Luckily, owing to his elevated position and an inability either to see straight or to stand still, no damage was done beyond a slight wound in the arm received by one of the Cossacks.

The hour being now late, and the birthday of the Czar having been duly celebrated, we took our leave after expressing our thanks to our host for a very pleasant and exciting evening.

It was a short time after this that I received the first instalment of a present from the Amir. The maxim that in Rome one must do as Rome does, is equally applicable to many other places, and the traveller in Persia unfortunately finds that to do in Persia as Persia does, is to a certain extent at any-rate an absolute necessity. Thus it came about that having, in accordance with the observances of the country, despatched to the Amir a present of some English cloth and Indian silver work, I found myself the lucky recipient of a return gift from his Highness. It came in instalments, for a very good reason from the donor's point of view. The Persian potentate loves above all things to be possessed of a numerous following of servants and retainers; but there being no proportionate love of unburdening their pockets to

provide pay for such followings, a delightful and characteristic solution of the problem has been evolved. They do not pay them, and as long as they are left untroubled by demands for wages, good. When, however, they realise that peace and quiet cannot continue owing to the importunities of their servants, they resort to the expedient of sending some wealthy neighbour a present. Now, according to recognised custom, which, like the laws of the Medes and Persians, altereth not, the happy recipient is obliged not only to make a return present of equal value, but also to present the bearers of the gift with sums of money in proportion, and the wages difficulty is for the time being settled. On the arrival of each instalment of my present, which consisted of half-a-dozen sheep, loaves of sugar, packets of tea, sacks of flour and rice, and a huge potful of ghee (clarified butter), I therefore found it necessary to present the various bearers with small sums of money. It is perhaps superfluous to add that no allusion is made of this exchange of gifts between the donors, any expression of pleasure being entirely contrary to etiquette in this land of bribery and corruption, where it so frequently happens that the presentation of a gift has a far deeper significance than a mere expression of goodwill towards the recipient.

Having made the acquaintance of the Amir, I now turned my attention to the two people of next importance, Mir Mausum Khan, the *sartip*, and Mohammed Reza Khan, the *sarhang*, both sons of the ruler; and the same farcical procession that had proceeded to the Amir was again on view. The house in which the *sartip* was living is situated in the only garden of the place, a few hundred yards to the north of Nasratabad, while the *sarhang* had a house

within the walls of the city. As I visited them both the same afternoon, I was afforded an opportunity of comparing the two candidates for the future possession of the sceptre in Sistan, a comparison which I am bound to say was more than favourable to the *sartip*. Both are of the same age—twenty-one, according to the *sarhang* (December 1900); but the difference between the two could hardly fail to strike the most casual observer. On visiting the *sartip* I was received by a quiet gentlemanly man with perfect manners, and when he talked, seldom without a pleasant smile despite a distressing disease of the eyes, from which I was sorry to see he suffered. In strong contrast was the loud-voiced welcome accorded me by his more flashy brother, who had, I fear, imbibed a good deal more spirit than was good for him, and talked and laughed uproariously throughout the interview.

The *sartip*, whom I visited first, received us in a darkened room (owing to the weakness of his eyes), which, like the Amir's hall of audience, was without ornament,—a few chairs, a table, and divan making the sum-total of the furniture. I could not help smiling when I noticed a large white bath-towel of European manufacture neatly spread over the table in place of a tablecloth. The influences of the West are beginning to make themselves felt in Sistan, the chief outward and visible sign at present being a rage for articles of European make, and the indiscriminate buying of such goods by people imbued solely with the ideas and tastes of the East is liable to produce results both bizarre and startling. At the time of my visit he was very full of a proposed journey to India by the Nushki route, with a view to consulting a first-class oculist about his eyes, and

as I had just travelled along the road, this subject naturally formed the chief topic of conversation. From the eagerness with which he questioned me, and the interest he took in my answers, I judged that he was very anxious to get started, and a good deal excited at the idea of crossing the gulf between Persia and India, and of seeing for himself the wonders of the great empire that lay beyond.

There is very little doubt that the *sartip* is a man of far stronger character than either his father or his brother, and it is equally certain that as far as Sistan is concerned he is the man of the future, provided always that the developments of the future, in which alien Powers must play a predominant part, will admit of a native of the country occupying a position of anything more than a puppet. Public opinion at anyrate holds no two thoughts as to who will wield the sceptre in the future, and from what I heard and from the little I saw of him during my stay in Sistan, I am inclined to think that he will make a strong and powerful ruler. Even at this present time his influence is very great, especially—through his mother, a Balooch lady of very high family—among the hordes of Baloochis who cover the country from Sistan to Herat.

I have mentioned the boisterous manner of the *sarhang*, whom I found to be a very coarse edition of his brother. He ushered us into his room with no very steady step, and having indicated by a lordly sweep of his hand the chairs he desired us to occupy, plumped down on to a third with such clumsy violence that the article not altogether unnaturally gave way. In no way abashed, he threw the broken chair aside, and with a remark which was presumably of a jocose nature, judging from the uproarious laughter with

which he followed it, succeeded in seating himself in another. The fittings and ornamentation of the room afforded evidence of the extravagant and uncultured taste of the man, every niche and corner displaying an incongruous jumble of vulgar trash: glass-ware, lamps, looking-glasses, pictures in gaudy colours, and a whole host of similar rubbish, for the most part of cheap German manufacture, being massed together, and kept, as far as I could see, solely in the capacity of ornaments. As may be imagined, there was not a great deal to be gathered from his conversation, and beyond eliciting the fact that he had been struck by the advantage of well-built houses since he had witnessed the success of Europeans in this line, and had become an enthusiastic builder himself, and that he was also interested in gardening, I gained nothing but an impression of a shallow and extravagant man who placed his own whims and pleasures first and all else nowhere. In extenuation I must admit that when he returned my visit a few days later in a condition of sobriety, he presented a much better appearance, and talked much more quietly and sensibly; but at the best he is not to be compared with his brother, whose temperate life and habits and strength of character are as striking as are the intemperance and weakness of the *sarhang*.

For the rest there are few men in Sistan who can be looked upon as likely to make any name in history. The two chief sirdars are Sirdar Purdil Khan and Mir Abbas, the first of whom played a more or less prominent part in local history, as will be hereafter narrated. From all accounts he is a man of fine physique and of a bold independent spirit, as his name, signifying Lion-hearted, suggests, and I can well believe that he is a man to command respect

among his own people, if he at all resembles his son, whom I had the pleasure of meeting. In Mir Abbas one sees a picture of good-natured content in the disguise of a country squire, who asks no more than to spend the days of an unambitious life surrounded by the grandchildren of a somewhat prolific family in the peace and quiet of his own domain.

In addition to these permanent inhabitants there were one or two visitors, all making a more or less prolonged sojourn in the land, carrying on their business, when they had any, with that contemptuous disregard for time which is so noticeable a characteristic of Persian methods. One gentleman who was on his way round the country in the capacity of official herald of the safe return of the Shah from his trip to Europe, had already occupied six weeks in making known the glad news in Sistan, during which time he was the recipient of presents and hospitality at the expense of the province, as being an emissary from headquarters; and as long as such hospitality continued to be on a sufficiently magnificent scale to satisfy him he would no doubt remain, only passing on with his news when he found there was little more to be gained by stopping where he was. News carried by such a messenger must become a little stale before being conveyed to all for whom it is intended. Of other sojourners whom I came across, two had managed to fritter away something like nine months in laying before the Amir demands for increased revenue on behalf of the authorities at Meshed, and yet another—an Afghan—was living in Sistan as a gentleman at large, for the very good reason that he did not dare live in his own country. He was a most amusing old gentleman, who had lived at Kabul in the time of Dost Mohammed, and had

been a great friend of Sher Ali, and until quite recently of Abdur Rahman. A day had come, however, when the latter had intimated that he would be required to give evidence in a false trial, got up against a friend of his, and being unwilling to do so, and being of the same mind, no doubt, as the Ghilzai chief who wrote refusing an invitation to go to Kabul,—

> "High stands thy Cabul citadel, where many
> Have room and rest;
> The Amirs give welcome entry, but they
> Speed not a parting guest.
> Shall I ask for the Moollah, in Ghuzni, to
> Whom all Afghans rise?
> He was bid last year to thy banqueting—
> His soul is in Paradise,"[1]

—had taken the only other alternative and sought voluntary exile in Sistan.

When I asked him if his life would not be safe in his own country that he was obliged to live in exile, he whispered mysteriously that in the dominions of his Highness Abdur Rahman there were things far worse than death.

[1] Verses written in India. By Sir A. Lyall.

CHAPTER IV.

THE COUNTRY AND AN ACCOUNT OF A SOJOURN THEREIN.

Sistan proper—An expedition to Koh-i-Khwajah—Cultivation—The bund of Kohak—Daily events—A visit to Mir Abbas—Ancient seals and coins—Christmas Day—The fast of the Ramzan—A visit from the Amir—The army in Sistan—The revenue—A shooting affair.

SISTAN proper—*i.e.*, that part of Sistan assigned to Persia by the Goldsmid Commission of 1872—consists of a vast alluvial plain bounded on the north by the Naizar, on the east by the main bed of the Helmund, on the south by the main irrigation canal taken from the Helmund in a western direction, and on the west by the Koh-i-Khwajah and the edge of the Hamun between that hill and the Naizar on the north. Roughly speaking, these boundaries were considered to enclose a space of 950 square miles, and to contain a population of 45,000 inhabitants. During my stay in the country I was informed that the population was generally considered to number from 80,000 to 100,000, which, however, was an admittedly rough estimate owing to the absence of any accurate data to go upon. A certain amount of friction also existed with regard to the Perso-Afghan boundary owing to the Helmund having changed its course, taking one considerably west of the one it followed at the time of the Com-

mission, the result of this deviation being that the Afghans encroached up to the present main bed, while the Sistanis maintained that their territory still extended to the former channel, now nearly dry.

To look out over the country from Nasratabad is to gaze over an absolutely flat and deadly uninteresting plain, practically treeless, and, in winter at anyrate, of a dirty greyish colour, presenting a mournful picture in monochrome. With the exception of a low range of mountains visible to the west—the Palan Koh—the only hill to be seen is the Koh-i-Khwajah, a low, circular, flat-topped hill of crystalline black rock, about sixteen miles from the capital, forming an odd excrescence in the otherwise uninterrupted surface. A ride to this isolated bluff gives one a fair idea of the nature of the country, and from the summit a view is to be had over pretty well the whole of the area, which lies spread like a map all round one.

I was blessed with a cloudless sky and an air with an invigorating bite in it as I rode out in the early morning of Christmas Eve. The land we rode over from start to finish was a thick deposit of rich alluvial soil, capable of producing prodigious crops, which must assuredly be the equal if not the superior of the fertile banks of the Nile, a region which it in many respects much resembles. So fertile, indeed, is the soil that the natives as often as not do not even take the trouble to sow their crops, but leave them to perform that office for themselves, and are so indolent and apathetic that they allow by far the greater portion of the land to lie waste, and produce but a tithe of what could be grown with the expenditure of a very small output of labour and capital. During the whole way till we reached the foot of the hill, and on every other occasion on which I rode out into the country, I never saw so

much as a single stone, a fact which alone bears witness to the excellence of the soil. The greater part of the country we rode over on this occasion consisted of uncultivated plain, sparsely covered with low scrub jungle; but here and there irregular patches of cultivation, unenclosed and with nothing to in any way mark them off from the general waste from which they were reclaimed, showed green with sprouting barley against the preponderating greyness all round. In many cases I noticed sheep and goats grazing on the young green shoots, a form of pruning which one would imagine was hardly calculated to promote the growth of the crop. Now and then we passed through villages, quaint clusters of sun-baked *gumbazes* (domes) of mud, sometimes inhabited and possessing on their outskirts small cultivated fields enclosed by low mud walls, but more often totally deserted and in more or less advanced stages of decay. Over the entire area was spread a network of ditches and canals, some full, some empty, some shallow, and some deep, but one and all, while making cultivation possible, impeding and retarding the movements of the would-be traveller.

Arrived at the foot of the mountain, we were confronted by a circular bluff of crystalline black rock rising to a height of from 300 to 400 feet above the level of the plain, with steep, almost perpendicular, sides, and having a circumference at the base of little more than at the summit. Such, at least, was the appearance it presented. Riding round from the east front, one's attention was attracted by the skeleton of a village of white mud clinging tenaciously to the steep mountain-side on which it was rooted, its houses rising in tiers one above the other, and showing clear against the background of black rock. Farther round to the south-west we came upon a gorge scooped out in

the hillside, which gave access to the summit. Entering this through a natural gateway between great buttresses of naked rock, we dismounted, and after a short scramble reached the plateau above. It consisted of an uneven surface of black gravel, on which were to be seen here and there the remains of mud buildings; and on the northern edge, from which the best view of the country is obtainable, stood a *ziarat* or place of pilgrimage. The *ziarat* in question was a building over the grave of a holy man, one Khwaja Sara Sarir, who had the reputation, according to Colonel C. E. Yate, of being a direct descendant of Abraham, and who must have been a saint of truly gigantic proportions, if the grave in which he lay, measuring 21 feet in length (!), can be taken as any guide. The Sistanis are said to assemble here in force on the festival of *Nau roz*, or New Year's Day (March 21), and to hold races, though one would think that any one who could find pleasure in racing over the hard uneven ground which constitutes the course must be shaped in a curious mould.

The view, though extensive, calls for little remark. To the west stretch the low line of the Palan Koh, to the north the blue waters of the Hamun, at this time of the year a long way off, and for the rest an unbounded plain, dotted with swamps and ditches, villages deserted and otherwise, and the black goat's-hair tents of nomad Baloochis. The floods to which the country is liable are at their highest in the spring, at which time the Hamun expands, often filling the whole depression which lies between it and the Koh-i-Khwaja, which is described by members of the Russo-Afghan Boundary Commission of 1885 as being an island in the middle of a huge lake. The main canal, which carries the waters of the Helmund westward

for purposes of irrigation, leaves that river at the point where is built the bund of Kohak on the border. At the present time the bund, which was originally a great dam stretching across the river, and diverting its waters into the canal, exists more in name than in anything else, being now nothing more than a temporary affair put up yearly when the river is at its lowest in the autumn, and invariably washed away when the river rises. The absolute necessity for a permanent dam, however, no longer exists, the bed of the canal having been worn to a sufficient depth to admit of its catching enough water to satisfy the indolent population. Was the level of the irrigating water to be raised only a little, there is no doubt that an enormous area of what is at present waste land could be cultivated, but this would entail careful draining to prevent other portions being inundated, and until the cultivation of the land is taken in hand by some one of a more energetic and ambitious nature than the passive Sistani, things are likely to remain *in statu quo*. The present cultivators will certainly do nothing of themselves to improve their position, and that they are not likely to be driven to any enterprise of the sort by their ruler is evident from a very characteristic remark he made when speaking on the subject; for when it was suggested to him what an enormous benefit it would be to his country if the whole of the waters of the Helmund, instead of running to waste in the Hamun, could be distributed over the country for purposes of irrigation, he replied, "But what would become of the feather-collectors?" The feather-collectors were a small body of men who earned a precarious livelihood by collecting and selling the feathers and down obtained from the numbers of wild-fowl that frequent the Naizar and Hamun.

It might be supposed that in a country such as this, with so scanty a European population, amounting during the greater part of my stay to M. Miller, Trench, and myself, — for M. Zaroodney and his companion were seldom to be seen, being variously occupied in distant corners of the country,—that time would hang heavy on one's hands; but this I found was far from being the case, and nearly a month sped quickly by before I found myself embarked once more on my journey towards the West.

Every Thursday a gymkhana was held on the *maidan* between the city and the Consulate, when the Sistanis gathered in large numbers to witness feats of skill, such as tent-pegging, lemon-cutting (for want of a better substitute onions took the place of lemons), and daring feats of horsemanship by the *sowars* of the escort, and to talk and drink tea and smoke the kalian provided for them. The performances which the Pathans went through on their horses were well worth witnessing, and among other achievements one young non-commissioned officer was wont to delight the astonished spectators by turning completely round in the saddle while galloping past, and continuing his wild career over the *maidan* seated with his back to the horse's head. Trenchabad was at all times open to the public, who came and went as they pleased; but these Thursday afternoons, when tents were pitched and carpets spread, were a special delight to the people, who took advantage in large numbers of the opportunity afforded them of an afternoon's enjoyment, where amusement was provided for them, and all they had to do was to play a part after their own hearts, of idle onlookers.

Other afternoons we played cricket on a portion of the *maidan* levelled for the purpose, and sometimes

football, and many is the game I enjoyed with sides made up of Persians, Baloochis, and men from the Panjab, Kashmiris, Pathans, Madrasis, and Sistanis!

In the mornings there were always people from the country anxious to dispose of their various wares. Baloochis would come with carpets, and saddle-bags and nose-bags of the same material, made by their women-folk, who spent the day thus occupied in their squat black tents, while the men attended to their flocks. Sometimes old coins and seals dug up in the half-buried villages were brought for our inspection; and often game, in the form of partridge, duck, wild goose, and hare, was brought for sale by the villagers. They were modest in their demands, seldom asking more than 1d. for a duck or partridge, and 3d. or 4d. for a wild goose or hare. Huge water-melons, which grow in any quantity, were brought and sold by the donkey-load, the ruling price for a donkey-load being one kran (about $4\frac{1}{2}$d.) Indeed living in Sistan is at present cheap, and I remember, when about to start for Birjand, purchasing fifty eggs for a kran, and four fowls for two.

Sometimes we rode out into the country; but travelling is not particularly pleasant, owing to the network of ditches and canals through which one has to wade; and moreover, owing to the absence of roads, the want of landmarks, and the sameness of all the villages, a guide was an absolute necessity when going anywhere out of sight of the city. One of the expeditions we made was to the village of Mir Abbas, who had given us such repeated and cordial invitations to visit him that we at last gave way. There had been heavy rain for a day or two before we started, and we floundered about painfully in the deep alluvial soil, and splashed through endless swamps of water on the way; but

to my surprise we found bridges spanning the larger canals, which saved us the wetting we should otherwise have had to put up with. Three or four miles from the capital we passed through Boonjar, reputed to be the second largest village in Sistan ; and two or three miles farther we came to Iskel, where we were met and welcomed by Mir Abbas, who conducted us to his guest-chamber. Here, reclining on carpets, we spent the afternoon, in company with our host and a portion of his family, drinking the tea and smoking the kalian which he hospitably provided for us, though his religious scruples forbade him breaking his fast himself—the fast of the Ramzan was in progress—till after sunset. Himself a man of prodigious proportions, he is the proud father of several equally gigantic sons, who sat and talked, good-nature writ large on their fat smiling faces, begging us even to stay the night. Indeed they are a large family in more senses than one, for in the course of conversation we learnt that, brothers, sons, nephews, and grandsons, they numbered all told the good round sum of seventy.

A peculiar mania of our host himself was the collecting of old coins, seals, and pebbles to be found among the many ruined and deserted villages throughout the country, and in the course of ten years he had managed to amass an enormous quantity, of which he was ludicrously proud. From an iron-bound chest he brought them forth in handfuls, asking our opinions on the coins, which were mostly Assyrian and ancient Greek ; but the climax was reached when he produced with a show of great importance two or three crystals, about the size of pigeon's eggs, and handed them over for inspection, asking me to put a name to them. I was not altogether unprepared for what was coming, and did my best to keep a solemn countenance when he

proclaimed with great impressiveness that they were diamonds! Such is his firm conviction, in spite of all the unfavourable replies he has received from different people whom he has consulted about them.

Before we left he presented me with a number of old seals and coins, some of them of gold, and all of considerable interest, which is more than I could honestly say for the pebbles and diamonds (!), and entertained us to such purpose that it was almost dark when we started back, and the flames of the ovens[1] of Boonjar blazed red against the sky as we passed through on our homeward way.

Thus occupied in the intervals of watching the progress of events political and commercial, the days passed quickly by, and Christmas was upon us almost before we were aware of it. It so happened that the Ramzan or fast of thirty days, during which time no Mohammedan may eat, drink, or smoke between the hours of sunrise and sunset, fell at the period when the whole of Christendom rejoices; but this was no obstacle to the inhabitants of Trenchabad making merry over a goodly Christmas dinner,—after sunset,—the majority of appetites being no doubt all the keener from their forced abstention during the day, digestion being still unimpaired by this irregular way of living, since the fast had only just begun. The Russian Consul honoured us with his company, and his Cossacks were entertained by our Pathan *sowars*,—a curious mixture of East and West,—the rest of the establishment messing together as they felt inclined. I doubt if anybody who could have looked into the cosy room with its blazing fire and shaded lamps throwing a soft light on an array of silver on the table, could have

[1] A public oven is invariably to be found in the villages, where bread for the whole community is baked every evening.

believed it possible that the whole was the creation of a few short months in a land cut off from Western civilisation in every direction by huge tracts of land to be crossed only by journeys of many days' duration, and whose nearest railway was nigh on 600 miles away!

During dinner *kanats* had been erected from the end of the house across the space in front, forming a square enclosure, and hundreds of tiny lights twinkled all round. In the enclosure thus formed the servants and *entourage* had prepared a *tamasha* for us, and amid the general goodwill of all Christmas Day in Sistan was brought to a close to the accompaniment of music, song, and dance.

It was instructive to notice the different ways in which people observed the fast. Some observed it strictly, fasting during the day and partaking of a single meal in the twenty-four hours, immediately after sunset. Others rose early and put in another meal just before sunrise,—to be absolutely correct, nothing should be taken after it is light enough to distinguish a black thread from a white one,—while some did not observe it at all. At the head of the latter list came the head mullah, an old man full of years, who armed himself with a medical certificate excusing him the fast on the grounds of bad health. The Amir, with a characteristic dislike of being inconvenienced, found a simple way out of the difficulty by merely converting night into day and *vice versa*. In accordance with this plan, he rose shortly before dark, and as soon as the gun announcing the hour of sunset was fired, sat down to breakfast! About 3 or 4 A.M. he would have dinner, and retired to bed when the morning gun informed him that day was at hand. An extremely unhealthy mode of life, the bad effects of which were noticeable

in all, with the exception of those who did not observe the fast.

One day immediately before the Ramzan a great event in the history of Sistan took place. The Amir, in coming to pay me a return call, took the opportunity of bringing out for the first time his carriage, and drove in state along the one road of the place—lately completed by Trench at a cost of 25 rupees—from his palace to the Consulate. We peeped at the procession from the window as it trundled laboriously along, first the carriage at a slow walk and behind it a crowd of followers on foot, the whole resembling a funeral *cortége* more than anything else. Having safely dismounted, he seemed in nowise anxious to trust himself to his vehicle again, and honoured us with a call of an hour and a half's duration, during which time, I frankly admit, I became most intensely bored. For myself I came to a full stop after I had asked him the few simple questions which generally sufficed for an interview, until he began asking for information about the revenue and army of India. This gave me a bright idea, and having satisfied him to the best of my ability, I inquired about his army and revenue. With regard to the former he told me that there were two regiments divided between Birjand and Nasratabad, comprising about 1200 men in all. Like many things in Persia, they were probably mostly in the air; for with the exception of men posted at the gates of the city and palace of the Amir, who showed themselves to be on sentry duty by getting up and making a wild grab at a gun, which was lying wherever he might happen to have left it, when any one of importance passed by, I never saw a single individual possessing anything in the way of uniform or of anything else that might proclaim him to belong to the army. As for uniform,

it is, I suppose, a recognised custom for the Amir to pocket the annual allowance made by the Government for that purpose.

The subject of revenue I judged was rather a sore one, and he replied rather shortly that it used to be 12,000 tomans, but was now 24,000. This was a rough estimate, to say the least of it, as will be seen from the following facts, which I gleaned later.

The gross revenue is estimated at 100,000 kharwars of grain, and about 7100 tomans as the value of other products, such as melons, cotton, poppy, Indian corn, &c. The Amir's share, exclusive of grain, came to a fifth of this—*i.e.*, 1420 tomans—plus an additional sum of 12,675 tomans, the value of a certain quantity of *bhusa*, firewood, &c., from each village, and the product of the sale of contract for collecting certain taxes on sheep and cattle, making his share in cash 14,095 tomans. His share of grain came to 30,000 kharwars, which was valued at 5 tomans per kharwar, and brought him in 150,000 tomans. His whole income then amounted to 164,095 tomans. Of this amount the Persian Government required in cash, as the proceeds of everything with the exception of grain, 2600 tomans, and in grain 24,012 kharwars less 9812, remissions to priests and sayeds, or 14,200 kharwars. In place of this quantity of grain they were content to take a cash equivalent at the rate of 7 krans per kharwar, which came to 9940 tomans. The total demands, therefore, of the central Government amounted to 12,540 tomans, and it must have been to this sum that the Amir was alluding when he told me the revenue was 12,000 tomans. This of course left him with an income of 151,555 tomans.

Some months before my arrival, however, two emissaries had come from Meshed — one of whom, an

Afghan, Mustofi Khalik Khan, I had the pleasure of meeting on one or two occasions—demanding on behalf of the Government a sum equivalent to the 14,200 kharwars, valued at 6 tomans per kharwar. If he agreed to this his own income would be reduced from 151,555 to 76,295 tomans, and it was hardly likely that he was going to submit to this without a fight. So it happened that the two envoys, who had already been in Sistan carrying on their argument for about nine months, were still there. As far as I could ascertain, the Amir, after having told them the futility of their demands owing to his not having the money to pay them, and having offered them the grain itself, which they refused to take as being useless to them, was sticking out for giving them the value at 15 krans per kharwar, while the envoys, under instructions from Meshed, had reduced their demands to 17½ krans. I believe that for the time being, at all events, the Amir's offer of 15 krans was agreed to, and Mustofi Khalik Khan started on his return journey to Meshed at the end of December. This would bring the demands of the Government, roughly speaking, to 24,000 tomans, as mentioned by the Amir on my questioning him about it.

After this, having consumed innumerable cups of tea and coffee, and having smoked copiously from the kalian —he brought his own, preferring it to cigarettes—he rose to take his departure, and we saw him once more into his hearse-like conveyance, a landau of sombre hue which he had got hold of when he was in Teheran, and of which he was inordinately proud.

If our occupations do not appear to be wildly exciting, my stay was not altogether wanting in incident of a stirring nature. It was the morning of December the 29th, and I was sitting writing in my tent when

my attention was attracted by a sound as of a man running; and when immediately afterwards I heard a sound as of my bath, which was leaning against the tent ropes outside, being violently kicked to the ground, I became certain that someone was in an unusual hurry to pass. At the moment I stepped out of my tent to see what was up, I became aware of a sound as of a second individual also seemingly in a desperate hurry, and was just in time to see a Pathan *sowar* rush wildly past in the act of raising a rifle to his shoulder. The next moment there was a loud report, and he disappeared behind the tent. All this promised well for exciting and unforeseen eventualities, and I stepped back into my tent for my mauser pistol, which being particularly wanted was of course not at hand, thus missing the next scene in the drama which was being enacted. The sight that met my gaze as I came out again was that of the hero of the rifle, disarmed, in the custody of two Persian *ferashes*, being led towards Trench, who had come out of the house on hearing the report of the rifle. There was little to be done where we were beyond ordering the prisoner to be taken in custody to the guard-room, danger for the time being having been averted by the prompt action of the *ferash* who had secured the prisoner.

The story came out by bits when the statements of the actors in what had narrowly escaped being a tragedy were taken down. The prisoner, one Sirdar Khan, when on sentry duty had left the guard-room and gone off to the city. On his return the *daffidar* in charge of the guard ordered his arrest, and he was forthwith confined in the quarter-guard. Finding an appeal for release was refused, he got it into his head that a fellow-*sowar*, Gholum Rasool by name, had encouraged the *daffidar* to refuse to free him, and persuaded one

of the escort syces to call him in order that he might speak to him. He then asked Gholum Rasool if he had spoken to the *daffidar* about his confinement, to which he received a reply in the negative. In the meanwhile the sentry stepped in, and sitting down opposite Gholum Rasool, took his hand and asked him to swear that he had said nothing. This conversation was rudely interrupted by a loud report, which brought

Pathans of Jacob's Horse.

both men to their feet, and Gholum Rasool, seeing Sirdar Khan with a smoking rifle in his hand just behind him, sprang out of the guard-room and ran. Sirdar Khan followed, reloading as he ran and firing again from beside my tent. This accounted for the part I had seen and heard. He was on the point of loading again when the Persian *ferash*, Mohammed Uslam Khan, pluckily closed with him and secured him. When it is taken into consideration that he had

seven more cartridges in his pocket when taken, that there were a number of people working close by in the line of fire, and that the bullet fired in the guard-room passed between the two men sitting together into the wall beyond, taking with it a piece of the sleeve and front of the sentry's tunic, it must be admitted that we were more than lucky to find that we had not been the spectators at or participators in a gruesome tragedy.

Such incidents are far from uncommon among Pathans, who are an excitable and fanatical race, and it was more than lucky that neither Trench nor myself came under his notice while he was in this condition of madness from excitement and passion. That they are Mohammedans is perhaps considered an advantage in sending them to a Mohammedan country; but it seemed to me that the advisability of detailing such men for escort duty in a remote and cut-off post such as Sistan, is, to say the least of it, questionable, especially when it is above all things desirable that the suite and retainers of the single British representative should be well behaved and orderly.

CHAPTER V.

THE STORY OF THE SISTAN OF TO-DAY.

Recent local history—Arrival of an Indian trader—Important position of Sistan—Russian projects for an invasion of India—Arrival of a British consul—Previous European visitors—Inclinations of the Sistani—Proposed journey of the *sartip* to India—The taking of an omen—Russian intrigue—Trade—Pros and cons of constructing a railway from Quetta to the Persian frontier—Advisability of establishing telegraphic communication—Survey for a railway sanctioned—Comments of the 'Novoe Vremya'—An Askabad-Meshed railway—The building of a steel chain across Asia—Against leaving Persia to Russia—Expert opinion—Value of Russian assurances—The only understanding possible.

HAVING given in the preceding pages a description of the country of Sistan and its capital, and some account of its people and my stay among them, it may not, I hope, be considered out of place in a volume which purports to be little more than a wanderer's diary among some of the less frequented byways of Western Asia, if I devote a few pages to remarks upon the existing situation as it appeared at the time of my visit. Staying as I did for a month within the confines of Sistan, I had some opportunity of watching the trend of events, and I have thought it possible that a short reference to such events as were enacted before my eyes might prove of interest to those who have considered the countries in this part of Asia in the light of something more than a mere mark upon the map.

Recent history concerning the chief local characters represented in the story of Sistan of to-day gives a picture of a house divided against itself, and of a land scourged with internal dissension, which troubles have, however, at the present time been smoothed to all intents and purposes, and lost to view, in the presence of circumstances of a far more important and far-reaching nature, and quite beyond the control of the natural owners of the country, over which fate and the struggle between two great alien nations have decreed that they should cast their shadows.

Recent history of the events which have placed the chief persons of importance in the positions they now hold is as follows :—

At the time of the Goldsmid Boundary Commission of 1872 there were certain Baloochi sirdars of high family living in Sistan, who, finding the award of the Commission not to their liking, crossed the border into Afghanistan, where they were received with open arms by the Amir, Sher Ali, at that time secure on the throne, who gave them money and permission to live in Afghan Sistan. While here, the two sirdars, Sherif Khan and Darwesh Khan, uncle and nephew, were able to give assistance to Abdur Rahman, then a fugitive, a kindness which he remembered when he became Amir; and sending for them to Kabul, treated them with honour and loaded them with presents. While here, Sherif Khan died, and the Amir divided his land between his two sons, Sayed Khan and Ali Mohammed Khan. Some time later, however, becoming suspicious of the doings of Sayed Khan on the Persian border, he ordered him to leave his home and to proceed to Northern Afghanistan.

Mir Mausum Khan, the *sartip*, at this time (1894) deputy governor in Sistan for his father, being a

nephew of Sayed Khan,—Mir Ali Akbar, his father, had married a sister of Sayed Khan's,—and being much attached to him, gave him every assistance and encouragement to return to Sistan, and assigned to him certain villages, the hereditary property of the Narhui tribe. In consequence of this breach of faith on the part of Sayed Khan, Abdur Rahman ordered his uncle and brother, Darwesh Khan and Ali Mohammed, out of the country, and transported them to Peshawar, whence they made their way *viâ* Quetta back to Sistan, and applied to the *sartip* for lands and villages.

This application the *sartip* refused, and Darwesh Khan, accompanied by Ali Mohammed, travelled to Tabbas to seek aid from Mir Ali Akbar. Here they were not well received, but, nothing daunted, made their way to Teheran, and returned to Tabbas with a *firman* from the Shah granting them villages in Sistan.

In a land devoid of roads and railways the pulse of Government throbs but feebly in the distant corners of the empire, and relying on this, as he is prone to do when the orders from the central Government do not happen to coincide with his own wishes, the Amir snapped his fingers and refused to recognise the *firman* of the Shah. Darwesh Khan, however, being of a determined nature, at once started for Meshed to lay his case before the *wali* (governor), and through him to have the orders of the Shah enforced.

Hearing of this, the Amir in a fit of drunkenness, and at the instigation it is said of his chief adviser, ordered Darwesh Khan to be entrapped and murdered. The luckless victim had journeyed but a march from Tabbas when he was overtaken, and under promises

from the Amir of a reconsideration of his decision, persuaded to return only to meet his death.

Sayed Khan and Abbas Khan, Darwesh Khan's son, incensed at this deed of treachery, at which, it is said, the perpetrator himself was greatly dismayed when he recovered from his drunken debauch, proceeded to Meshed and reported the circumstances to the *wali*. As a result the Amir was sent for and threatened by the Persian Government, and was finally forced to take *bast* owing to an attempt being made upon his life. In the end, however, as might be expected in a land where government and justice stand on a frail foundation of bribery and corruption, heavy bribes prevailed, and the Amir returned to his province.

Meanwhile fresh complications had arisen in Sistan owing to the *wali* having assigned additional lands to Sayed Khan, some of which belonged to the Sarbandi tribe, at whose head was Purdil Khan. Objecting, with some reason, to property belonging to the Sarbandi tribe being handed over to a Narhui sirdar, he applied to the Amir for their restoration. The latter, still mindful of the castigation so lately received at the hands of an incensed Government, refused to interfere with the *wali's* orders, and Purdil Khan at once returned and set about taking steps on his own account. Gathering his tribesmen around him, he set out to besiege Sayed Khan with 600 *sowars* and 100 infantry. Hearing of this, the *sartip*, though quite a boy, showed thus early his spirit of independence by summoning his troops and marching out to help his uncle; but receiving peremptory orders from the Amir, was obliged to return. After a stubborn fight, Sayed Khan's village was taken; but the victor finding himself in no position to retain it, terms were come to between the two combatants through the mediation of one Khan jan Khan,

who had lately married Sayed Khan's daughter, by which it was agreed that Sayed Khan should cross the Afghan border.

About this time the Amir, hearing that his deputy at Nasratabad was abusing his power and ruling with a heavy hand of oppression, ordered him to leave Sistan, and sent his other son, Mohammed Reza Khan, the *sarhang*, to rule in his place. This the *sartip* at first refused to do; but the instigator of Darwesh Khan's murder, who had accompanied the *sarhang* as chief adviser, being in his turn murdered, with, it is to be feared, the connivance of the *sartip*, the latter repaired to Birjand and took up his abode with his uncle, the Shankat-ul-Mulk, Amir of Kain.

It was during the governorship of the *sarhang* that Seth Suleiman, the Quetta merchant, and Captain Webb Ware, who was in charge of the trade-route, reached Sistan early in 1900, and a short time afterwards the Amir, being outbid in his annual bribe to retain the governorship of Tabbas, repaired to Sistan to take up the reins of government himself, which place he reached a short time prior to the arrival of the British consul. One of his first acts was to send for the *sartip*, ordering him to come and live in Sistan, an order which he for some time refused to obey, except on condition that Sayed Khan might accompany him. The Amir, however, was firm in his refusal to allow the Balooch chieftain within his province, and in August 1900 the *sartip* came and took up his residence in Sistan. It was on the occasion of his arrival here that M. Miller, the Russian vice-consul, refused to pay the first call, and the *sartip* being equally stubborn, neither had called on the other when I arrived in December, as a consequence of which they were not on speaking terms. This seems to have been a curiously false move

for a clever man like M. Miller to have made; for the *sartip* being a man of great influence, and much feared and respected by the people, carries public opinion to a great extent with him, and to have alienated him from the Russian cause was to alienate the whole of his large and powerful following, which might more than probably include, through his uncle, the hordes of Baloochis who cover the country from Sistan to Herat.

Such was the position of the pieces on the board when, early in 1900, a new element from outside was ushered on to the scene, which was destined to change the character of the game from a struggle of merely local interest, in which irresponsible units made moves of no sufficient consequence to excite the attention of any one beyond themselves or their immediate neighbours, to a conflict of international importance, in which the pieces became puppets moved and controlled by the guiding hand of the two great rivals, who are playing a game in earnest for supremacy in Asia.

The important position occupied by Sistan must long ago have been recognised, and it seems curious that so little active interest has been taken in it before now. There is no question that Russia looks with covetous eyes upon a port on a southern sea, and that she would give a good deal to see herself firmly established in some port—Bunder Abbas, Chahbar, or Gwetter—on the Persian Gulf. An inspection of the map renders obvious the extraordinary advantage it would be to Russia to be in possession of Sistan in prosecuting her schemes in search of such an outlet on the south, the direct route from her base in Transcaspia, and only practical one in Eastern Persia as long as that country is anything but a Russian possession, leading of necessity through Sistan; for on the east lie Afghanistan and Baloochistan, while on the west an impracticable

desert, the terrible Dasht-i-lut, bars the way. For long she has been stealthily eating her way into Khurasan, stretching out her tentacles, and slowly but surely closing them with an iron grip on her luckless victim, who is quite powerless of herself to resist. Khurasan once a Russian province,—the northern half is little more save in name even now,—her next step would be to absorb Sistan, which without external opposition would fall an easy prey, as any one who has the most superficial knowledge of the Persian and the recent history of his country must indubitably admit, whence she would be in a position to make her way to the sea and the outlet of which she is so anxious to be possessed.

Unfortunately for her,—and for those who are in favour of leaving Persia to her fate,—England has interests which she is bound to protect, to the furtherance of which Russia in command of Eastern Persia, and established on the Persian Gulf, would be an insurmountable obstacle. Writing on the Sistan question in 'Persia' (published 1892), Lord Curzon says: "I do not for a moment lay stress upon the other aspect of the positive value to Russia of Sistan—viz., as facilitating her approach to the southern seas —because I assume that a Russian port upon the Persian Gulf or the Indian Ocean would no more be tolerated by any English Minister or Government than would an English port on the Caspian by any Czar." And that his views upon this question remain unaltered may be presumed from the policy of the Indian Government which is being pursued in connection with Sistan at the present time.

Apart from the commercial aspect of the question,—and Russia in possession of Eastern Persia spells annihilation of British and Anglo-Indian trade in that

country,—the installation of Russia in Sistan would bring her into such proximity with the Indian empire as—in light of the various schemes which she has from time to time drawn up for the invasion of the empire, beginning with the project of the Emperor Paul, who as far back as the year 1800 actually started an expedition on its march for the conquest of India—would be intolerable, necessitating as it would the keeping up of a vast army in readiness on our frontier and an enormous expenditure of money. From a description of the country between Quetta and Sistan, it must be obvious that an advance through Baloochistan to India, as compared with a similar advance through the mountainous districts of Afghanistan,—peopled with a turbulent and fanatical population with a backbone in the Afghan army, of troops armed with modern weapons, fighting for their own freedom, if not in alliance with England,—would be as mere child's play, to say nothing of the immense advantage of having the granaries of Khurasan and Sistan from which to feed her army.

This being the case, it was plain that the insinuating advance of the "Colossus of the North" in this direction must be stayed, and the question which arises is, How? Since little is to be expected of the Persian, who is quite incapable of helping himself under such circumstances, it is obvious that to stem the tide of Russian advance and to check the evils which are the necessary result of her determined march towards the south, the only hope is to oppose her with the influence of a Power equal to herself; and it is with some few details of personal observation in connection with the struggle which, none the less keen because it lay partially hidden beneath the surface of friendly social intercourse between the two persons chiefly concerned, was

in progress in Sistan at the time of my visit that this chapter is chiefly intended to deal.

In the spring of 1900 a British representative, Major Chenevix Trench, holding the rank of consul, arrived in Sistan to look after the rapidly increasing trade between India and Persia by the Nushki trade-route, and made his entry into Nasratabad with some *éclat*, the *sarhang* riding out at the head of a troop of horsemen to meet him and escort him through the city to an excellent site on which his camp was pitched. A short time before a representative of Russia with the rank of vice-consul had arrived, and had been received with a small *istikbal;* but from what I could gather on the spot, his entry had been made the occasion of but little demonstration of welcome, and appears to have been looked on by the people in a far less favourable light than the arrival of the British consul. He obtained a house in Husseinabad, which I have already mentioned, and Trench, after suffering the discomforts of camp life through the fearful Bad-o-sad-i-bist-soz, and the plagues of insects which it brings with it, obtained leave to build houses for himself and staff, and laid the foundation of the buildings which in the space of a few months grew into the settlement which I have already described as Trenchabad.

Till now Sistan had been troubled but little by the visits of Europeans and their ways, the sum-total till the boundary Commission of 1872 amounting to a few travellers and explorers scattered over the first half of the nineteenth century; and though the Sistanis had seen something more of Europeans since that time, among whom may be enumerated members of the Russo-Afghan Boundary Commission of 1885, who passed through Sistan on their way from India, various officials who have held the position of consul-general at

Meshed and consul for Sistan, Major Sykes, the British consul at Kerman, and Major Brazier Creagh, who visited the country on a mission from India in 1897, yet they were far from being accustomed to the idea of a European dwelling in their midst, and it is not altogether to be wondered at that they should at first have been suspicious and inclined to hold aloof. Any feeling of the kind, however, was soon dispelled by the cheery *bonhomie* and tactful manner of the British consul in dealing with the people; and at the time of my visit, to ride through the city or anywhere else in his company was to experience those marks of courtesy so dear to the Persian mind, the merest labourer bowing politely and uttering some word of salutation as he passed.

The inclination of the Sistani to side with the British rather than with the Russians was very marked, and indeed most travellers in Persia seem agreed that were the English able to show the same practical indications of power as does Russia, the native would be far readier to side with them than with the Muscovite, whose high-handed manner is in reality far from popular. Moreover, we have in addition the opinion to the same effect of one whose knowledge of the Asiatic is derived not only from study but from inheritance. With regard to the inclination of the Persian, the late Amir of Afghanistan, Abdur Rahman Khan, writes: "Those people who believe that the Persians are more under the influence of Russia than that of England are wrong; they must know that it is the constant fear of Russian force which makes Persia obliged to keep quiet and to suffer under Russian influence. Should Persia ever see Russia in serious trouble with England, Persia would be the first Power to release herself from the bear's claws."

But it is unfortunate that the *wali*[1] at Meshed, who is the superior of the Amir of Sistan and a thorough Russophile, or at anyrate strongly under the sinister influence of that Power, should have the adverse influence that he undoubtedly has over those under him. An illustration of this unfortunate state of affairs was forthcoming before I left, in the case of the detention of the *sartip*.

Mir Mausum Khan had obtained leave and made arrangements to travel to India in order to consult an oculist about his eyes. He was very full of his projected journey when I called on him, and had actually shut up his house and sent off the greater part of his transport with a view to leaving the following day, when the Amir suddenly changed his mind and ordered him not to go. Some explanation of this sudden change on the part of the ruler was naturally required, and herein was visible the character of the Oriental. The Amir could not allow his son to leave until he had taken an *istikarra* (omen). The next day at anyrate he could not let him go, it being an unlucky day. Provided the omen was good, he could start the day after. Three questions were submitted to the aged mullah to give an *istikarra* upon: (1) As to the advisability of going to Russia to consult an oculist—which question, I imagine, can only have been inspired by Russian agency; (2) as to the advisability of waiting to see a Russian doctor, who M. Miller averred was on his way to Sistan; and (3) as to the advisability of going to India. The mullahs had been treated well at the hands of the *sartip* during the time of his governorship, and it is probable that the old mullah did as much

[1] This particular governor died before I reached Meshed; but there is little reason to suppose that his successor is in any way less under the thumb of Russia than he was.

as he dared for him by returning answers to the effect that the *istikara* regarding the first proposition was bad, regarding the second good, and regarding the third indifferent.

Needless to say all this parade about unlucky days and the taking of omens was merely the oriental method of sugaring over the unpalatable taste of unwelcome orders from Meshed, in the form of a *firman* from the *wali* forbidding the Amir to allow the *sartip* to go to India till he had been first examined by the Russian doctor, then on his way. In this particular case, however, I do not feel at all certain that his wishes did not to a certain extent coincide with those of Russia,—the *wali* would hardly have been guilty of such superfluous energy on his own account,—but he would never have had the determination to put a stop to the *sartip's* going at the last moment without some additional force behind him. Russia's reasons for wishing to keep such an influential local factor from becoming further Anglicised by going to India are obvious; a wish to detain him on the part of the Amir would be inspired by the fear that his son, of whose power he was already sufficiently aware, might return from India with too great an idea of his own importance, and with the connivance of his new-made friends might attempt to wrest the sceptre from his father.

So far, then, Russia may claim to have scored, for the Amir issued orders to the effect that the *sartip* was not to leave the country till he had consulted the Russian doctor; but their triumph was of short duration, for a few weeks later, almost immediately after the arrival of the Russian, the *sartip* left for India.

Beyond attempting by one means or another to get the native persons of importance under her thumb, and to check as far as possible the growth of British trade,

Russia's energies on the eastern border of Persia seem at present to be devoted to intriguing with the tribes on the border-land, to stirring them up as far as possible to a state of discontent, and to instilling into them ideas of the might of Russia and the weakness of England. One of the emissaries employed for this purpose I had the pleasure of meeting on several occasions in the person of M. Zaroodney the naturalist.

He and his companion, whose name I never could grasp, spent most of their time in making expeditions into the country, ostensibly in search of natural-history specimens; but they returned from time to time, bringing with them birds and insects of divers kinds and a store of information about the animals of the country, which was poured into our ears whenever M. Miller was available to interpret—for French, with which he had but a slight acquaintance, was the only language that we had in common. Among other discoveries he had succeeded in finding and capturing a number of small birds which he called "Yates' sparrow," a variety of which only a single specimen existed in the British Museum, and an unknown kind of goose; but when I asked him if the latter would be known to posterity as the "Anser zaroodnianus," he shook his head, saying he left it to others to give a name to new specimens—unexpected modesty on the part of a keen collector.

Beyond searching for natural-history specimens—a pursuit which probably did duty as a blind more than anything else, though I am bound to say he gave one the impression of having a very considerable knowledge of his subject—his chief occupations appear to have been mapping and intriguing. That he was engaged in mapping there is little doubt; that intrigue was one of his favourite pastimes there is no doubt at all. On one occasion, in a fit of incredible generosity,

he presented a Balooch sirdar, who had devoted his services to the interests of Britain, with a rifle! To the sirdar's credit be it said, he refused the gift, saying that when he was in need of bribes from Russia he would apply for them. When, further, the poor naturalist (he always impressed upon us the fact that he was a very poor man) distributed rifles and other presents right and left among the natives of importance on the frontier of British Baloochistan in the neighbourhood of Mirjawa, it was patent to all the world that he was merely an agent for someone else, and for whom but the Russian Government?

The two naturalists left Sistan the day before I did for Kerman and Chahbar, a port in Persian Baloochistan, though what particular bird, insect, or grub they were in search of in the latter place they did not divulge.

In Sistan the fear so noticeable as one travels farther north and approaches the Russian base, of Russia and her army, is not nearly so strong as in other parts of Khurasan, and it is to bribery and intrigue that she at present looks to further her aims here, as demonstrated by the facts above recorded. No one is more alive than she to the truth of the adage that not to progress is to go back, and since she is in no position in Sistan to carry things with the high hand that she is accustomed to in districts more thoroughly under her control, the means she resorts to are the tentative alienation from allegiance to Britain, and the stirring up of discontent among the border tribes, as well as to putting what obstacles she conveniently can in the way of Anglo-Indian trade.

At the time of my visit the place was beginning to boom. Merchants in India were beginning to hear of the large profit the firm of Ali Mohammed had already

made with a small capital, and many were the traders who wrote for information about the route, or stated their intention of coming to open up business in Sistan. Sistan itself is not sufficiently large to accommodate a great number of merchants; but from Sistan it is easy to go on to Kerman, Birjand, and Meshed, at all of which places traders from India should find a good opening. The chief products of Sistan itself that are paying exports are ghee (clarified butter) and wool, the former of which could in 1900 be landed at Quetta, where the market price varied from 40 to 45 rupees a maund (80 lb.), at a cost of 20 rupees per maund; and the latter, which commanded a price of from 16 to 30 rupees a maund, according to quality, at a cost of from 9 to 13 rupees. From Birjand, Herat, and Meshed, carpets, saffron, oonab (a berry used in medicine), asafœtida (a gum-resin used in medicine), caraway seeds, dried fruit, pistachio nuts, and almonds are exported, and realise large profits in the Indian markets.

As for imports, the Sistani will buy anything, fancy goods being immediately bought up by all who can afford them. Tea, indigo, leather goods, English cloth, boots and shoes, furniture, all have a ready sale. I brought fifty arm-chairs, belonging to Seth Suleiman, from Quetta with my caravan, and before I left every one had been sold. Among other things he told me that he had ordered 200 ready-made lady's dresses from Bombay as well as a large number of lady's hats and shoes! Imagine the jewel of the harem in a picture hat and low-cut evening dress! Novelty is no doubt responsible for the great demand for fancy goods and European costumes, and it is hardly likely that the rage for them will continue when the newness has worn off; but such things as tea, indigo, leather

goods, &c., should find a permanent market, black tea of good colour and flavour being in great demand, and from the number of people who affected clothes of linen dyed blue, one would imagine that indigo should have a ready sale. Indian sugar has very little chance against the inferior bounty-fed stuff which floods the country from Russia; for though the Persian admits the superior quality of Indian sugar, he quotes the cheapness of the Russian export, and says, moreover, that a lump of Russian sugar lasts much longer and does for more than one cup of tea! Old Haji Khan, the Persian whom I met at Dalbandin, when talking of such things, remarked on one occasion, with a certain dry humour, that if this was the only quality required it would be cheaper to use a lump of marble, which would do service for an indefinite number of cups!

When the new trade-route was first opened in 1896, the trade along it amounted to a lakh and a half of rupees. The trading season of 1897-1898 increased this to five lakhs, that of 1898-1899 to upwards of seven lakhs, and that of 1899-1900 to something over twelve lakhs. The returns for the year 1900-1901 [1] are bound to be infinitely greater, no less than 1000 camels from Herat traversing the route for the first time during the first half of the caravan season, and the first *kafilah* from Birjand, consisting of 250 animals, headed by the Shankat-ul-Mulk's own camels, reached Nasratabad on its way to Quetta while I was there. They spoke also of more to come not only from Birjand, but also from Neh and Sebzewar.

Needless to say, it is with anything but favour that

[1] The 'Gazette' of India for November 9, 1901, contains a note by Captain Webb Ware to the effect that the total trade over the route for 1900-1901 reached about £102,000, shared almost equally between imports and exports

Russia views this increase in the trade between Persia and India, and rumours are carefully put about among the Persian camelmen and merchants that a journey to India involves dire risk of plague and other pestilence, and to such an extent is the plague bogey carried that in self-defence the Persians have had to place quarantine stations on their eastern frontier, knowing full well that had they not done so themselves Russia would have seized the opportunity of doing so for them. The presence of Russian doctors would have necessitated the presence of Russian Cossacks, and from endless examples throughout Central Asia she must have had a very shrewd notion that it would be likely to be a case of Russian Cossacks once there, Russian Cossacks always there. Thanks to the *laissez-faire* method which characterises the carrying out of most Persian schemes, the quarantine on the Perso-Balooch border was, I believe, only there in theory; but on the Perso-Afghan boundary something of a practical nature was in working order, as when at Birjand I came across a single tent outside the town, which I was informed was the segregation camp, and was also told that the Persian doctor was away attending to his duties on the frontier.

Such measures seemed to have little effect, however, in checking the trade, and if the advent of a railway from Quetta to Robat depends upon the increase of trade along the route, the increase has surely come. But it is probable that the opinions of others besides those of commercial men will have to be consulted before the consummation of such a scheme, and judging from conversation I have had with military authorities on the subject, I am inclined to think that the voice of the strategist may be heard in protest against converting the desert tracts which at present

lie between the defences of the Quetta plateau and Sistan into an easily traversable highway. On the other hand, it is hardly likely that arrangements could not be made, in the event of such a line proving to be a point of weakness from a strategic point of view, which would ensure its being rendered useless to an enemy should it ever become necessary for us to stand behind the bulwarks of our frontier defences. At any-rate, whatever the objections raised to a railway to the Persian frontier, on the score of it weakening the defences of India from a military point of view, I have never heard of any beyond that of expense being urged against a line as far as Nushki, which would be of the greatest benefit to camel-owners. As I have in a previous chapter insisted, the country between Quetta and Nushki is not suitable for camels; Nushki would make an excellent terminus to a camel-route, and Quetta does not, for which reasons the great advantage that would accrue from connecting the two places by rail is obvious.

The Sistanis at anyrate have made up their minds that a railway is to come, a question I was frequently asked being not if a railway was going to be constructed, but when; and the head mullah himself, old and feeble though he is, declared that he would be among the first to travel by it.

Putting the question of a railway aside for the moment, there would appear to be no reason whatever for further delaying the prolonging of the telegraph line from Nushki to Robat or even to Nasratabad. It is true that there was an idea prevalent that the construction of such a line had been reported impracticable; but if there was any truth in the rumour, I fancy the ground reported on must have been that through which the older route ran, where it crossed the desert

of sand to the north-west of Amir Chah, for I could see no obstacle whatever to such a project along the route by which I travelled. The advisability of having some such means of communication is unquestionable when it is realised that, as things are at present, the officer in Sistan can scarcely hope to receive a reply from his Government to any question he may ask in anything under six weeks, a delay which might prove of serious consequence in any undertaking requiring immediate sanction.

Since writing the foregoing pages news has come to hand that Lord Curzon has at length succeeded in solving in a satisfactory manner the problem of constructing a railway between Quetta and Nushki, to be subsequently extended as far as Sistan, and the following comment has appeared in the 'Novoë Vremya'[1]:—

Though Russia has fully appreciated the importance of Seistan, she has made no vigorous efforts to strengthen her influence there, and Great Britain has profited by her inaction to push ahead in that quarter. The political and economic difficulties of Great Britain at the present time made it appear very doubtful that she would decide on taking so bold a step, the consequences of which will be tremendous. If we do not undertake anything serious as a counter-move to this action Great Britain will soon become *de facto* mistress of Seistan, thus taking in rear our movements towards the south. The Quetta railway will not stop even at Seistan, and it will be connected by way of Kirman with the Bagdad railway. The same period will witness the completion of the junction of the Anglo-Indian railways with the Chinese railways. Hamburg will then be connected by an uninterrupted network of lines with the Yang-tse Valley, and this steel band will cut us off from the Turkish Straits, from Mesopotamia and

[1] In spite of such news, I have reason to believe that the voice of the military strategist is, as I anticipated would be the case, being raised in protest, and that, for the time being at any rate, the Quetta-Nushki route is in consequence likely to remain *in statu quo*, as far as steam communication is concerned.

ERRATA.

Page 348, footnote, line 3, *for* "Quetta-Nushki route" *read* "Nushki-Sistan route."

Page 352, line 6 from foot, *for* "menace of war" *read* "menace in war."

the Persian Gulf, as well as from the Indian Ocean. Our progress towards the Bosphorus and into the depths of Central Asia, the strenuous work of a whole series of generations, will thus have become a useless waste of energy, the fruits of which will be torn from us by others.

Our conquerors will in all probability show a generous spirit, and will permit us to unite our branch railways with their grand central line, but that would only serve to open a way for the invasion of our country by foreign influence, as also by British and German industrial products. Now, as such a dark future would be equivalent to the complete wreck of all Russian hopes, and to the abandonment of all her historical problems, it is difficult to believe that she will yield.

We will not renounce without a struggle those aims for which we have already done so much; but why go to meet an arduous struggle when there are means to avert it? Until now Russia has always adhered to an obstructive policy in the Near East, preventing other Powers from undertaking anything whatsoever, and likewise undertaking nothing on her own account, always allowing herself to be drawn away to other tasks. But this policy of a continual veto cannot last indefinitely. In their race for new markets the Western Powers have begun more and more to penetrate into the Near East, to subject it gradually to their influence, and we have now reached a time when Germany, coming from Asia Minor, and Great Britain, from India, are prepared to join hands together. Now, in order that such a contingency may not come to pass, we must endeavour to thwart their plans —that is to say, we must proceed towards the south by means of a railway in the direction of the Indian Ocean.

Basing her calculations on the previous policy of Great Britain in these parts, Russia had some right for supposing that it would be "very doubtful that she would decide on taking so bold a step," and that she has done so has come, no doubt, as an all the more unpleasant surprise from its having been so unexpected. At the same time it is interesting to learn, in the light of my experiences, that "though Russia has fully appreciated the importance of Sistan, she has made no vigorous

efforts to strengthen her influence there," a remark which ungratefully ignores the strenuous efforts made by M. Miller to render Russian influence paramount in that country.

History points to the fact that a weak policy in dealing with Russia is a mistaken one. We have been far too prone to accept without reserve any statement she has chosen to make, in spite of the repeated examples we have been given of the absolute worthlessness of her word, and to let things slide when our eyes have at last been opened to the fact that she has gained her end, and that we have been deceived. That Russia would go to war with England, even in her present "political and economic difficulties," if she could possibly avoid it, is more than improbable, and a bold front shown by us will undoubtedly have a most desirable effect in checking her high-handed and aggressive policy in countries which must, in the interests of British commerce and prestige, be saved from becoming her dependencies.

It is said that in reply to the Quetta-Nushki railway Russia is embarking on a railway from Askabad to Meshed, and according to latest information the course of such a line is being rapidly pegged out. Such a railway was in contemplation long ago, and though the news that the Quetta-Nushki Railway is to be undertaken may have precipitated matters, it would have inevitably been undertaken before long; and when I was in Meshed it was generally looked upon as a scheme of the near future, and in connection with it arrangements were then being made for establishing a Russian bank in the town.

The binding of a steel chain across the south of Asia, spoken of as the object of our policy in the 'Novoë Vremya,' is an idea possessed of many attractions; but

a railway of this kind cannot be made in a day, and much might happen before it could be completed, even supposing that any such scheme was in contemplation; nor does it seem, taking into consideration the detestation in which the German people hold us, together with the obviously purely selfish aims of her foreign policy, that we should be likely to derive any great benefit from a situation which would place us, in the event of our joining her railway through the Euphrates valley, in a position of dependence upon her goodwill. At the same time, if I can see no absolute necessity for coming to any definite understanding with the Teutons, I cannot for a moment agree with those who advocate giving up Persia to Russia, nor can I imagine any one who has visited these regions and seen for himself the position of affairs obtaining there doing so either. I would point out to those who do persist in advocating such a course the truth of the remarks in a letter to the 'Times' of December 2, 1901, from Major F. E. Younghusband:—

> We have not yet heard any satisfactory reason why Russians want to come to the Persian Gulf. It cannot be for trade, for there is none, and never would be, between the Persian Gulf and any territory now in Russian possession. Until, therefore, the Russians themselves, and not merely the anti-Germans here in England, show cause why we should allow them to occupy a position of more or less menace to us, would we not do well for once to show some consistency and continue the policy we have pursued for a century of maintaining a sole and paramount influence in South Persia and on the Persian Gulf?
>
> The South African war should have taught us one lesson at least—the immense advantage which the defence has over the offence in present-day warfare. In Asia we are on the defensive. We therefore possess now an advantage we did not suspect two years ago. The Russians are obviously at a corresponding disadvantage.

The opinions of one, such as the author of the above letter, on Asiatic questions, based as they are on knowledge, the outcome of actual personal experience of the countries and peoples with which they deal, are of far greater value than any number of arguments hatched in the fertile brain of stay-at-home politicians, and are no doubt those, in the main, of every practical man who has inquired into the questions on the spot.

If we are to maintain our position in Asia, Persia must not become a Russian province. No one realised the danger of such an eventuality better than did the late ruler of Afghanistan, who, I suppose the most captious will allow, had every reason and exceptional opportunity for studying problems in which the existence of his own kingdom played so important a part. That he recognised the importance of the maintenance of the integrity of Persia he shows by his words: "If Russia occupies or takes under her influence any one of the three countries—Afghanistan, Persia, and Turkey—it would injure the other two as well as affect India. Therefore," he says in his advice to Great Britain, "her aggression should be opposed when it is turned against any one of these countries."

Nor is there any dearth of men, competent to pronounce on such questions, who have not hesitated to utter grave words of warning. Russia on the Persian Gulf, a position in which so many writers at the present time seem so desirous of placing her, would, in Captain Mahan's opinion, place her in a flanking position, and "entail a perpetual menace of war"; while, in the judgment of Colonel Mark Bell, it would "envelop Afghanistan, threaten India's flank, and menace the main arteries of communication which lead not only to India, but to the Far East, and Australia as well."

In reply to those who advocate a complete and

formal understanding with Russia, General Collen, late military member of Council in India, says: "The reply to this proposal is simple. No one would guarantee the continuance of such an understanding for ever, and however friendly our relations may be at the present time, . . . it would be unwise to count on these remaining eternally unbroken." There is some force in the remark that "no one would guarantee the continuance of such an understanding for ever": no, and it may be added, not for a moment longer than it suited Russia to observe it. Passing events are quickly forgotten, but it seems incredible that those who have made any study of Anglo-Russian relations in Asia should have to jog the memory to be enabled to call to mind examples from the volume of treaties, promises, and assurances which have been consumed on the altar set up by the high priests of Russian political morality to the god of diplomatic prevarication and falsehood whom they worship. Is it possible that the statements of Count Schouvaloff to Lord Granville early in 1873, to the effect that, so far from there being any intention on the part of Russia of taking possession of Khiva, positive orders had been given to prevent it, are already forgotten, despite the fact that these assurances were given but a few months prior to the seizure of the place by General Kaufmann? Are the assurances of Count Schouvaloff and M. de Giers to Lord Salisbury and Lord Dufferin respectively in 1879, that there was not the least intention of occupying Merve, already forgotten? Or can we ignore the fact that though Batoum was ceded to Russia on condition that it was not to be fortified, and was to be maintained as a free port, it is now not only not a free port, but also one of the strongest fortified positions on the Black Sea?

It is absurd to be blind to the fact that, however

plausible and reassuring the voice of the Russian charmer at St Petersburg and London, the doer of deeds on the spot cherishes in his inmost heart the policy towards Persia advocated in the apocryphal testament of Peter the Great: "Hasten the downfall of that country; find an outlet in the Persian Gulf, and thus re-establish the former commerce of the Levant, and press on towards India!"

Fifty years ago the aggressive policy of Russia in the East was summed up by Lord Palmerston, as is pointed out by Krausse,[1] in the following words: "The policy and practice of the Russian Government has always been to push forward its encroachments as fast and as far as the apathy or want of firmness of other Governments would allow it to go; but always to stop and retire when it was met with decided resistance, and then to wait for the next favourable opportunity to make another spring on its intended victim. In furtherance of this policy the Russian Government has always two strings to its bow—moderate language and disinterested professions at St Petersburg and London; active aggression by its agents on the scene of operations. If the aggression succeed locally the Petersburg Government adopt them as a *fait accompli* which it did not intend, but cannot in honour recede from. If the local agents fail, they are disavowed and recalled, and the language previously held is appealed to as a proof that the agents have overstepped their instructions."[2]

Russian policy in these respects is the same to-day as it was fifty years ago, and it is to be hoped that those who are now sounding a note of warning against an apathetic and vacillating policy in Persia will be rewarded with something better than the callous in-

[1] Russia in Asia.

[2] Life of Lord Palmerston, by the Hon. Evelyn Ashley.

difference with which the words of wisdom uttered by such men as MacGregor, Rawlinson, Malleson, and others have been treated in the past. The only understanding that we can come to with Russia, if the power and prestige of Great Britain are to be maintained in Asia, is that she has reached a point in Iran beyond which farther advance in search of territorial aggrandisement cannot be tolerated, and it rests with the only nation capable of doing so to see that the peril which is hanging like a sword of Damocles over the august majesty of the Shah is averted.

CHAPTER VI.

SISTAN TO BIRJAND.

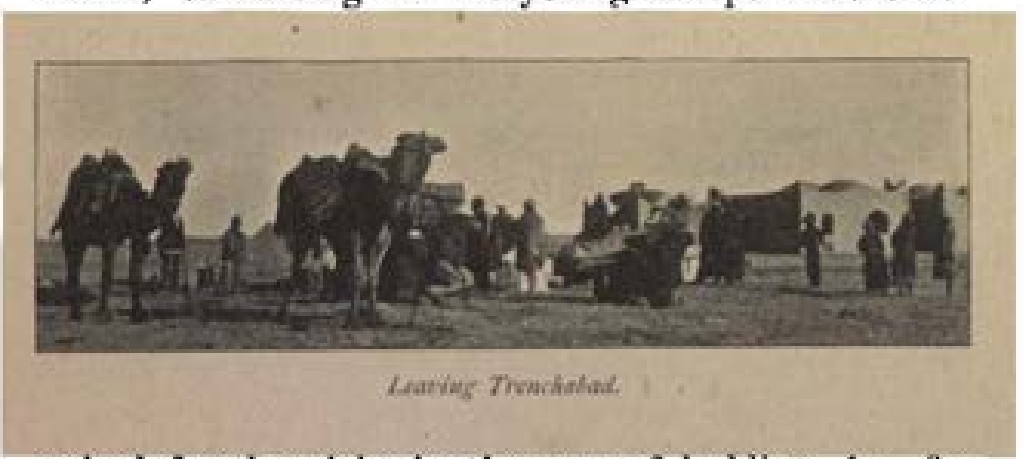
Difficulties of getting transport—I leave Trenchabad, but a mistake on the part of my *kafilah-bashi* leads to my returning again—Torrential rain—Off once more—An unpleasant ride and a cold night—My horse goes lame—I get letters—Gazelle—Snow—We reach Mud—Curiosity of the people—Reach Bujd—Birjand—Bird's-eye view of the town—Various visitors—Increase of the population—I call on the Amir—Trade—Ralmat Khan's shooting exploit.

If I found no difficulty in getting to Sistan, I discovered that getting away again was quite a different matter. The only form of transport in the country was camels, the few mules there are being the private property of the Amir; and the only camelman who was willing to proceed in a northern direction was a sulky and vacillating Birjandi, who could in nowise understand why the *feringhi* should be in such a break-neck hurry, the passing of time being an unconsidered quantity in his oriental conception of life.

I had calculated on sending off my camp on the 1st, and on following myself on the 2nd; and on that date everything was packed and ready to start except the camels—a rather important exception—which failed to turn up, the camelman, when he appeared, saying that he had changed his mind, and had decided not to go, at anyrate for the present. To the European, who is

accustomed to passing his life in an atmosphere of clock-work regularity, such ruthless upsetting of his plans is apt to be irritating; but in a country where the prevailing form of government is anarchy, he is placed in the unenviable position of having to grin and bear it; and it was not until the 9th that I prevailed upon the independent camelman to start, by promises of pay vastly in excess of the recognised charge for merchandise.

He announced his intention of going but a few miles the first day, to a village to the north-west of Nasratabad; so sending on everything except what I required for the night in the way of bedding, &c., for which I kept back two camels, I told him to leave the rear-camp at the village mentioned for me the next day, when he would take the advance-camp on one march ahead, to a spot known as Bering.



Leaving Trenchabad.

On the afternoon of the 10th, having bid farewell to the inhabitants of Trenchabad, I set out in company with Trench, who was going to see me as far as my first camp. It was a cloudless day, but a bitterly cold wind swept over the plain from the north with ungovernable fury, chilling us to the bone as we cantered over its unprotected expanse. We reached the village where I was to camp soon after 4 P.M.; but, to my

utter disgust, there was no camp to be seen. Owing to an idiotic mistake both camps had gone on to Bering, and all that was left here were the two camels which had preceded me in the morning.

Under the circumstances we decided that the only thing to do was to return to the capital, leaving the two camels to go on and join the rest of the camp at Bering as soon as they could. I would then ride out to Bering myself the next day. Having procured a donkey from the village to carry back my bedding, we turned our horses' heads once more towards Trenchabad, and by eight o'clock we were restoring our spirits and our frozen circulation under the influence of an excellent dinner and the pleasing warmth of a huge log-fire. The tent I had been occupying having been struck, I slept very comfortably in the dining-room, not altogether sorry, since I should reach Bering just the same the next day, to be spending such a wild night under a hospitable roof instead of in an 80 lb. tent.

The Fates, however, were all against my departure; for in the early hours of the morning rain began to fall, and throughout the 11th such a storm raged over Sistan as had not been known for many years. Any attempt to reach Bering was quite hopeless, to say nothing of the impossibility of getting a guide to turn out on such a day; and as the only indications of direction in a plain devoid of any landmark are occasional foot-tracks running from village to village, all of which present an appearance exactly alike, a guide intimately acquainted with the country is an absolute necessity.

As the day wore on things began to look serious. At midday the flagstaff came down with a crash; small patches of damp began to show themselves on the in-

side of the mud walls, and a continual thud and splash told of portions of the outside of the buildings being washed away under stress of the storm. In the afternoon the rain became snow, a state of things unknown to the oldest inhabitant, and by evening the main street of Trenchabad was 8 inches under water. At night the wind, which had dropped during the day, blew a hurricane, and I congratulated myself on being still beneath the roof of the British Consulate. The morning of the 12th was ushered in with a sharp frost, covering the pond formed outside with ice: but rain had ceased falling, and I determined to reach Bering if I could; for I felt some anxiety as to the welfare of my servants, and was also impressed with the necessity of taking fodder for the horses, Bering being, according to report, merely a spot on the plain at the edge of the Hamun, and devoid of supplies of any sort.

Accordingly, accompanied by a Persian *ferash* and a Sistani guide, and with four ponies lent me by Trench carrying *bhusa* (chopped straw) and barley in addition to my bedding, I started once more, in the teeth of a howling gale, on my oft-postponed journey. It was an awful day for such a march, and we floundered painfully along through the rich alluvial soil, reduced by the heavy rain to a mass of sticky, slimy mud. At half-past one we entered the huge reed-bed which extends along the edge of the Hamun, and is known as the Naizar, and a mile or so farther on came across one of my camelmen with two of the camels, sitting quietly down where he was, and making no attempt whatever to move on and join the rest of the camp. I had his single tent down pretty quickly, and set him going before I went on myself.

Another hour and a half and we were through the

Naizar, and emerged on the edge of the Hamun. This, my guide informed me, was Bering. There was nothing to distinguish it in any way from the rest of the country, and a more bleak and desolate-looking spot it would be hard to imagine.[1] The only sign of life was a solitary camel standing motionless on the plain and gazing into space with the placid countenance of a sphinx, and I soon noticed that my guide was anxiously scanning the horizon in search of camp. The tents, however, were nowhere to be seen, and for another hour and a half we struggled on through deep sticky mud, battling against the icy wind, which continued blowing with unabated fury, numbing feet and hands till they lost all sense of feeling, before we at last caught sight of a white speck among some low mounds, and urging our horses to a final effort, cantered into camp. The night was bitterly cold, and the wind, which I had hoped might subside with nightfall, distracting, and I thought regretfully of the snug dining-room and cosy corner by the fire of Trenchabad, as, wrapped in a greatcoat and Balaclava cap, I munched at the greasy mutton, which became encased in a covering of congealed fat on its way from the plate to my mouth.

There was a great improvement in the weather on the 13th, for though the wind was still high, the clouds had cleared off, and we were cheered by a bright sun.

[1] This is by no means an uncommon phenomenon in Baloochistan and Eastern Persia. Sir Thomas Holdich, in giving a description of Nushki as he found it when passing through in 1885 on his way to Northern Afghanistan, writes: "Arrived at Nushki, . . . it was difficult to realise that we had arrived anywhere in particular. There is this prevailing characteristic about many of the halting-places in Baloochistan, *i.e.*, a featureless blank space in the general wilderness, which might be any other houseless, treeless space but for the presence somewhere or other of a trickle of water." An apt description, which is as applicable to many places in that part of the world to-day as it was to Nushki in 1885.

The two camels and four ponies which had been unable to reach camp by night turned up in the course of the morning, and everything being at last collected together, and reduced to a state of comparative order, I started off my advance-camp, and listened with satisfaction to the clanging of the bells become gradually less distinct as the camels, moving with silent ghostly tread, passed into the darkness of the night.

A sharp frost had dried the ground and covered all the pools and puddles with ice, leaving a keen bite in the air as I jogged along westward under a cloudless sky. Away over the Hamun and Naizar clouds of duck and wildfowl were to be seen flying in all directions, testifying to the numbers that exist on this elastic expanse of water. Once past the Hamun, we got out of the rich alluvial soil of Sistan and made our way over huge bare plains of gravel. In front of us lay a low ridge of barren hills, and farther away to the south-west stretched a line of snowy mountains glittering in the morning sun. We had been going for about three hours when my horse went suddenly dead lame, and became so bad that I was forced to get off and walk—no very great hardship, however, on a bright winter's day; and leaving Ralmat Khan to bring him along, I stepped out, and an hour and a half later reached camp, pitched by a small stream a few miles from the foot of the hills in front of us. Though the water of the stream looked clear and good, I very soon discovered that it was extremely bitter, and during my stay here the nauseating taste of salt water permeated all my food.

Night was again very cold, and clouds began to gather on the horizon as I left camp on the morning of the 15th. A short distance over the same stony plain brought us to the foot of the hills, which we entered by

a defile between high walls of rock. At the mouth of this passage through the hills was a grove of palm-trees, with a small village standing on the edge of it, from which the inhabitants flocked to gape at the strange spectacle of a white man riding through their midst. As we rode on over a level stretch of cultivated soil between ridges of rocky hills, more signs of habitation became apparent, and small collections of houses enclosed by high mud walls, little clumps of trees, quaint-looking windmills, and tiny patches of young green barley, all went to show that we were over the desolate and uninhabited stretches on the north-west border of Sistan, and were once more in a country possessed of a sprinkling at any rate of inhabited and cultivated oases.

My horse became so bad here that I was forced to leave him behind, and handed him over to one of the Balooch *sowars* who carry the post-bag from Nasratabad to Birjand, whom I found living in a village hard by, telling him that he could keep him if he got better in the course of the next few days, but if not that he had better shoot him. For the rest of the way to Birjand I rode one of my *sowars'* ponies. I was entirely in my camelmen's hands as far as time and direction were concerned, and from here they went across country, leaving the main caravan-route which passes through Neh, and which I did not get on to again till within four marches of Birjand, and camping whenever they considered that they had marched far enough. My progress consequently through an intensely dull and uninteresting country was far from rapid, and I longed for a congenial companion to help to while away the time.

On the 16th we marched over a level stretch, at first of good soil and then of stony ground, while all round

barren hills rose in isolated groups and ridges from the plain. Towards the end of the day's march on the 17th we got into more mountainous country, where here and there hills higher than the rest were lightly flaked with snow, affording some little relief to the dreary dust colour of the whole landscape. As I was leaving camp on the 18th two Balooch *sowars* rode up on their way with the mail-bag to Birjand, carrying also some letters for me forwarded from Nasratabad—an instance of how letters reach one, even in the most unexpected places. We rode along together for some way over the usual monotonous stretches of gravel, earth, and rock till we came upon the tents pitched in the very middle of a cheerless plain. Though not so cold as it had been of late, heavy clouds hung threateningly all round, and the outlook was indescribably dull and dreary. On the 19th we made better progress, getting over about thirty miles during the day through country much the same as usual, though the plain was covered for the greater part of the way with large leafless bushes, grey, dried up, and dead-looking. Towards the end of the march we skirted along the edge of a large swamp surrounded by great patches of glistening salt, to the east of which rose a bare mountain-range of burnt sienna, smudged here and there with odd patches of brick red.

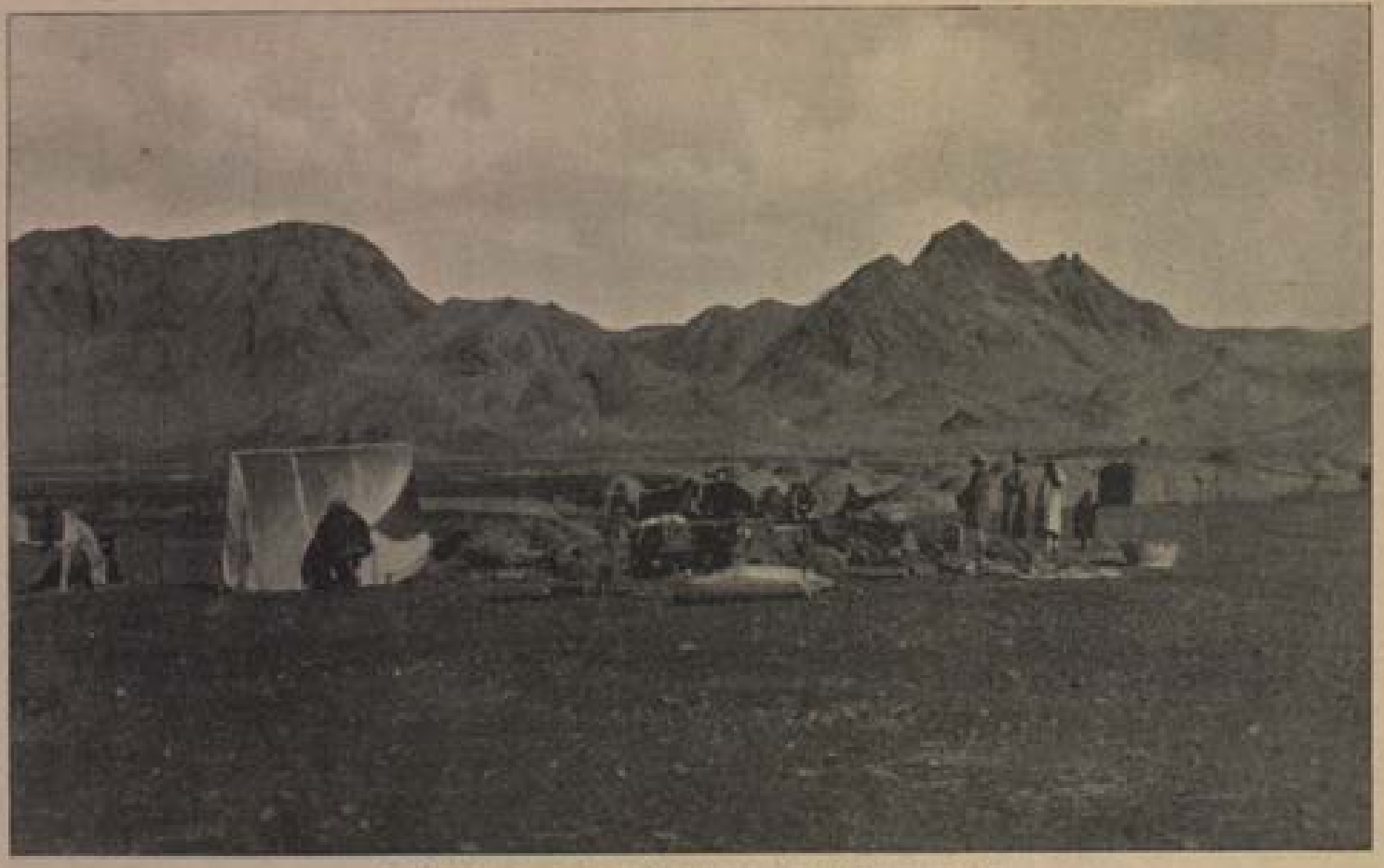
Almost immediately after leaving camp on the 20th I came across a herd of eight or ten gazelle, among which the glass showed several buck with fine horns; but my rifle unfortunately had gone on overnight, and I had to be content with watching them. These gazelle are not the chinkara found scattered over the plains of India, but the variety known as *Gazella subgutturosa*; for though I never shot one myself, I saw a number of specimens in possession of natives at

different times, and the form of the horns stamped them as belonging to the latter variety. Near the head of the plain along which we were travelling we came upon some acres of cultivated land, and a village of perhaps 150 small domed houses, massed closely together, the inmates of which crowded on to their roofs to stare at us go by. Our road took us along the *karez* or *kanat* which brought water from the mountains at the head of the plain. Parallel to and within a few yards of the one in working order were the shafts of an old and disused one. the people preferring, it would seem, to construct an entirely new *kanat* to repairing an existing one which happens to have got blocked, though where the economy in making an entirely new aqueduct in place of repairing an old one comes in is not altogether obvious.[1]

We now crossed the hills at the head of the plain, passing a *kafilah* of forty camels *en route* for Sistan, which showed that we had once more joined the regular caravan-route, and entering an elevated valley which boasted of a certain amount of cultivation, camped at the second of two villages which we came to. The people were inquisitive and curious, and gathered in crowds round my tent till I got my *ferash* to explain that I was a very ordinary individual, and hardly worth watching.

On the 21st we continued for some way along the valley, bordered on the west by a fine range of

[1] The Persians would seem to have a penchant for doing things in the same sort of way as the Chinaman who set fire to his house in order that he might have roast pig for dinner, as witness the tale told to O'Donovan to the effect that the old town of Radcan had been removed from its former site owing to an epidemic caused by certain foul drains and cesspools in the neighbourhood. "One would have thought," he naïvely remarks, "it easier to remove the cesspools than the town and population, but they do things differently in Persia" ('Merve Oasis').



CAMPING AT A PERSIAN VILLAGE, JANUARY 20, 1901.

mountains deep in snow, and then ascended by a steep pass on to higher ground, where snow lay to a depth of 6 or 8 inches. For the rest of the day we were winding about among hills, and in snow the whole time, till we reached a sheltered hollow in which were situated a couple of villages, where we camped.

The 22nd was a miserable day: a thick white mist shrouded all the hills, heavy clouds hung low in the sky, while a biting wind blew in fitful squalls, adding to the feeling of discomfort already produced by the cold raw air. The camelmen had refused to take my advance-camp on overnight, and though they had started with daylight, I soon overtook them, and at one o'clock reached Mud, a large village on the edge of the snow. In addition to the village itself, which covered a considerable area, there was also a large walled enclosure or citadel a little apart from the rest. Having got here, and knowing my camels to be far behind, I sought some place of shelter, and was at first shown a miserable hovel which might have been an inferior cowshed, but which I was told was the serai! Here, the object of interest of an inquisitive crowd, who filled the open space which should have supported a door, I remained till a certain owner of camels, hearing of my arrival, came and invited me to rest in his house. He showed me into a comfortable domed room, clean and tidy, with a carpet on the floor, and a spacious fireplace at one end in which he soon had a good fire burning, a luxury I had hardly hoped to enjoy. We remained for some time sitting on the floor opposite one another in front of the fire, an enforced silence, owing to my inability to speak or understand Persian, making it a little trying; but after a little while a friend dropped in, and they talked away to one another, interspersing their conversation with frequent remarks to me, though

they must have been quite aware of the futility of such a proceeding. Half an hour or so later my host went out, leaving his friend, however, to keep me company, and by degrees other friends dropped in one by one to have a look at the stranger, and in a very short time the room was full of people all squatting down on the floor, and all staring at me and talking and laughing and asking me questions, in spite of their receiving no answers, and of my repeated gestures and head-shakes, implying that I did not understand them. I have frequently found occasion to heap imprecations on the heads of the builders of the tower of Babel; but never have I done so more fervently than I did during the two hours and a half that I was the unwilling centre of interest of this impromptu durbar, while I waited for my dilatory camelmen. No sooner did one man take his departure than another took his place, and by this process of shuffling I must have been examined and stared at by a large percentage of the total population before Ralmat Khan at last returned to announce the arrival of my camp.

During the night there was a slight fall of snow, and at seven o'clock I learnt that the camelmen had not started, and furthermore, that they refused to proceed during the day. This was a display of pure pig-headed obstinacy on their part, for we had been travelling through snow for the last two days, and, moreover, I could see that no snow lay on the plain between us and Birjand, so I informed them that if they did not start immediately they would receive not a single kran of pay. This brought them to their senses, and they got the camels loaded and started off. About 2 P.M. I reached Bujd, a village inhabited by Sunni Mohammedans, an unexpected phenomenon in a country which is the home of Mohammedans of the Shiah

persuasion, and my camels being far behind, I went through the same menagerie-like performance as at Mud, being on view—free of charge—from two till five, when camp turned up.

From here I sent word to hospital-assistant Abbas Ali, an Indian subject residing at Birjand as agent in the interests of Anglo-Indian trade, informing him of my arrival at Bujd, and requesting him to meet me on the morrow.

The distance was not above seven miles, and at 10.30 I left Bujd, and shortly after starting was met by Abbas Ali and Munshi Oomar Din who was in charge of Seth Suleiman's branch at Birjand. A mile or two before reaching the capital we passed a large walled enclosure, containing a house and garden belonging to the Amir of Kain, whose headquarters are at Birjand, and shortly after midday entered the capital, a large mud town, and dismounted at a house which his Highness had very kindly put at my disposal during my stay in his city. Here I found welcome in the form of a present from the ruler, consisting of tea, loaves of sugar, and two gigantic trays piled high with a most pernicious-looking sweet composed of something like 80 per cent of sugar and 20 per cent almond: a truly useful gift to a traveller passing quickly through the country! For this delectable compound I had to disburse something like 100 krans to the grinning harpies who had brought it.

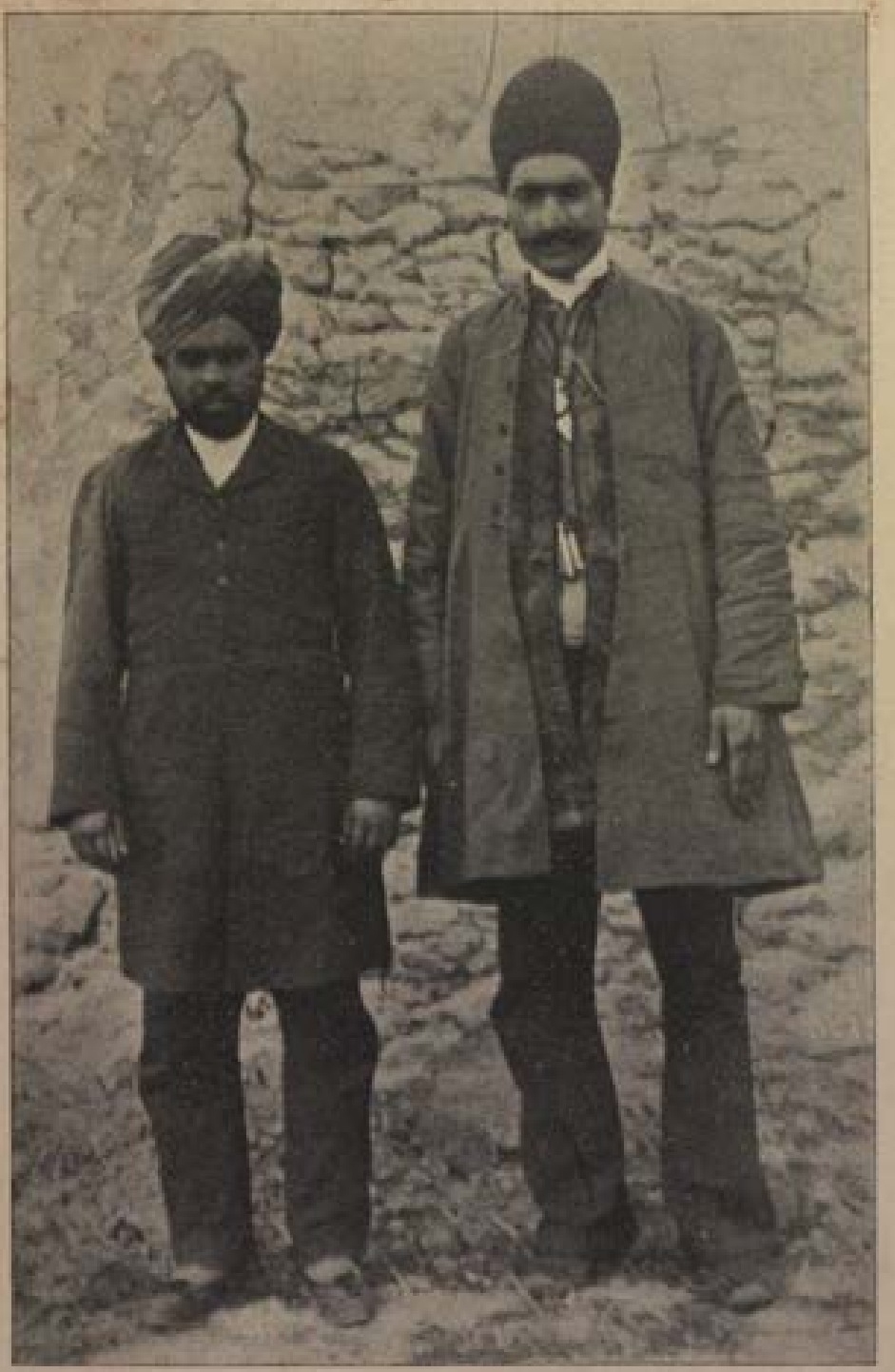
It had been my intention to stay a couple of days at Birjand, and then to continue my journey north; but in no country that I know of is the truth of the saying that "Man proposes, but God disposes," so thoroughly and so frequently forced upon one as in Iran. In this case the devil of delay, which holds unquestioned sway over the country, was the instrument used to frustrate

my plans, and kept me for twelve days within the precincts of the city.

Owing to the uneven nature of the ground on which the town is built, one sees but a small portion of it from the plain over which one rides when approaching from the east, and it is not until one has climbed one of the many low irregular-shaped hills which surround it, and looked down on it from above, that one can claim to have seen the city in its entirety. From such a point of vantage one sees spread out before one a stretch of hilly ground thickly covered with a mass of irregular domed houses, with here and there an edifice

The Old Fort, Birjand.

larger than the rest standing out conspicuous with upper story and bald flat roof, usually the residence of some servant or retainer of the Amir. At the south-east corner stands the old fort, the usual high mud walls enclosing a few houses and a fine mosque and courtyard, built and completed by the present ruler about five years ago, by far the finest building I saw in Birjand, which has little to boast of in the way of architectural beauty. Through the northern part of the town a broad thoroughfare runs crescent-wise from end to end, dominated at its western extremity by the new fort, an erection standing on the summit of a low

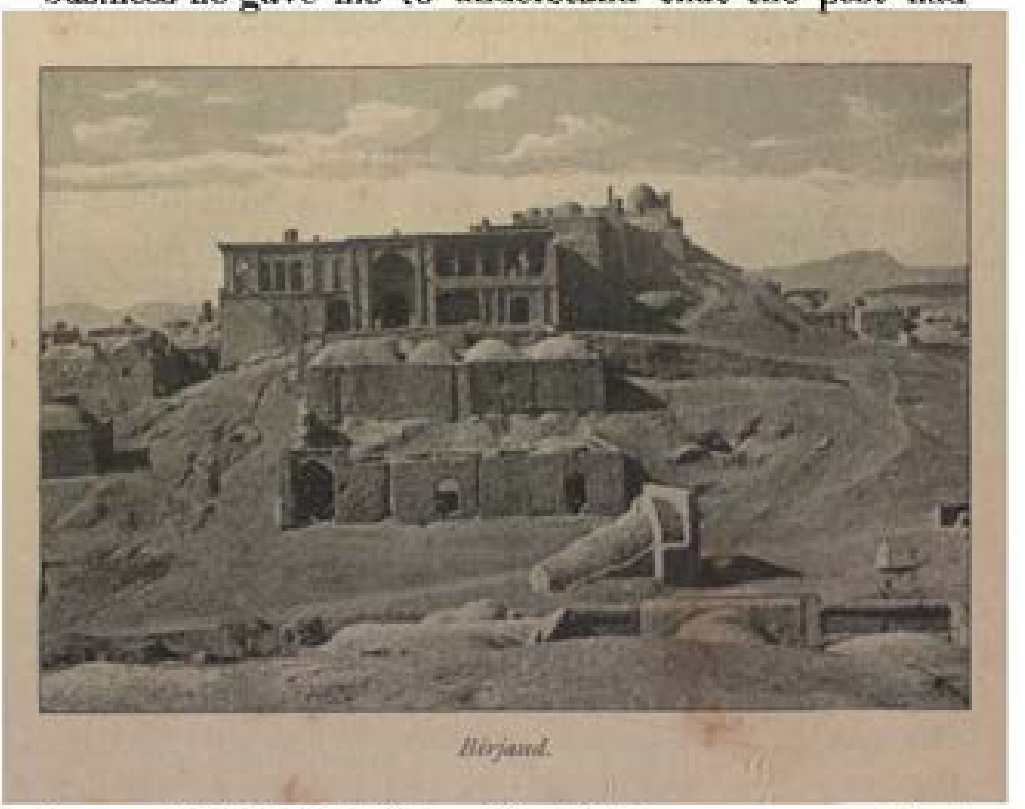


ABBAS ALI AND SIRDAR KHAN AGHA.

hill. It is known as the "new fort," but would appear to have very little valid claim to either title, consisting as it does at the present time of decayed mud walls enclosing the ruins of what might once have been houses. I was struck with the spectacle of such a fine broad thoroughfare in a town which for the rest boasted of nothing but narrow lanes and winding alleys, often mere tunnels beneath a conglomerated mass of buildings; but the result of inquiry showed that it was no fault of the people that they were possessed of so spacious a street, as it was in reality the bed of a stream which, in the wet season, returned to its original office of waterway. On each side of it stood lines of small shops, and on the northern side was an imposing caravanserai, quite recently completed.

During my stay I received visits from a number of people, including one from Sirdar Khan Agha, brother-in-law of the Amir, the postmaster-general, and a carpet merchant of high repute. The first took a great fancy to my boots, and had no hesitation in expressing his wish to be possessed of them. Having a spare pair, I made him a present of them, and in return he sent me two bottles of Persian wine. The postmaster was the most interesting man of the three, and by far the most Europeanised, having travelled in Russia and penetrated as far as Moscow. He asked me if I found Persia a very bad country to travel in owing to the lack of proper roads and railways, and when I suggested that they might come, he replied, "Yes, in three hundred years perhaps!" I then asked him if he would like to see a railway from Quetta to Robat, to which he replied with a wink that he would rather see one from Teheran first, as if there was a

railway from Quetta and none from Teheran, India would be able to send troops and take the country before Persia could bring up her forces on camels to defend it. I asked him if he seriously thought there was anything in his country which was in any way likely to excite the cupidity of Great Britain, at which he laughed uproariously. In connection with his own business he gave me to understand that the post had



Birjand.

been established in Birjand for thirteen years, and that he had been postmaster for six. He also expressed a hope that a Persian postal system would very shortly be established between Birjand and Sistan. "Very shortly" is an elastic term in Persia!

From conversation with various people I gathered that Birjand was a great trading centre, and that besides one large and several smaller *madresschs* and

schools, there were six or seven large serais for the accommodation of the *kafilahs* which were always coming and going. The population was generally agreed to be about 30,000, which points to the increased prosperity of the town of late years; for in 1890 it is spoken of as a town of about 14,000 inhabitants, while Colonel Yate when visiting the place in 1894 put down the population at 25,000. The chief water-supply is brought from the hills by *karez*; but this is hard and brackish, and for drinking purposes rain-water is caught and preserved in large tanks. Among other institutions which I noticed were public baths, and not far from my house stood one of those unwholesome-looking dungeons. The appearance of the exterior, however, deterred me from inquiring personally into the system and management obtaining in the interior, though as I witnessed steam escaping from chinks in the mud roof, which was little above the level of the ground, I conclude that it is something akin to a Turkish bath.

The event of chief importance during my stay here was my visit to Mir Ismail Khan, Shankat-ul-Mulk, Amir of Kain. Formerly one Mir Alam Khan, Hashmat-ul-Mulk, ruled with a powerful hand over the whole of the possessions now divided between his two sons, the elder of whom now reigns in Sistan as Hashmat-ul-Mulk, while the province of Kain was given to the younger, Mir Ismail Khan, with the title of Shankat-ul-Mulk. His reception-room, which was distinctly more palatial than that of his brother, was rectangular in shape, with dimensions of about 25 feet by 12. The four sides were composed chiefly of windows of stained glass, extending from a frieze about 2 feet from the ceiling down to the floor.

There were seven of these windows on each side and two and a door at each end. The spaces between the windows were filled with pillars about 18 inches in diameter, which, like all the other solid parts of the building, were of white chunam. In front of the windows and doors hung red curtains, and from the ceiling a glass chandelier. The furniture consisted of a round marble table and a few chairs.

The Amir, a stout man of medium height, resembles his brother the Hashmat-ul-Mulk. Like all the nobility of Birjand, whose code of philosophy seemed to be of the kind which teaches them to "live to eat" rather than to "eat to live," he drinks a great deal and is an inveterate opium-smoker. He seems to be favourably inclined towards the English, but refused to be led into making any compromising statement of his opinions. When I asked him about his army, he said that the Shah paid for two regiments; "but," he added with oriental grandiloquence, "all my people are soldiers, and I could at any moment summon to arms 50,000 or 60,000 men." Such an army of his people would truly be a mob worth seeing! On leaving I found half-a-dozen men, in untidy red uniforms, drawn up in line, looking for all the world like a row of little tin soldiers. I learnt that they belonged in reality to the band—the band being in all probability the only branch of the service able to produce a uniform at all. The impression which I received of the Amir was of a man far less influenced by contact with European ideas than his brother, and of a potentate who thought much of the advice, "Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die." At the same time he takes an interest in modern inventions, and at this time he was suffering from a damaged thumb, the result, he in-

formed me, of experimenting with firearms. I have reason to believe that he is in high favour with the central Government at Teheran, a position which he is successful in retaining by means of large annual gifts, in confirmation of which he showed me an autograph letter from the Shah thanking him in the most flowery language for presents lately received.

The trade of Birjand seems to be chiefly in carpets, almonds, saffron, caraway seeds, *kundur* (gum), *manna* (gum), wool, oonab, and asafœtida. Munshi Oomar Din has a shop in one of the principal caravanserais, where he sells piece goods, and seems to be satisfied with the progress he has made since his arrival. Most of the carpets are manufactured at a place called Durukhsh, and the carpet merchant of whom I have already spoken assured me that the finest designers in Persia were to be found there, and that he could have a carpet made for me of any design that I liked to suggest. Oonab, a berry used in medicine, grows locally, the majority of the trees which are to be seen near the town being oonab-trees.

There seems to be little game in the vicinity, a few oorial perhaps in the mountains, though judging from an incident which took place a day or two before I took my departure there must be a number of pigeons close to the town. I had given Ralmat Khan twenty cartridges and my shot-gun, and told him to go and forage for the pot. Half an hour later he returned and presented me with eight pigeons and sixteen cartridges, remarking casually that he had been rather lucky with one shot which had brought down five birds! I desisted from further questioning, fearing that he had assuredly found his way into somebody's tame dove-cot.

LIST OF MARCHES FROM NASRATABAD TO BIRJAND.

	Miles.
1. Nasratabad to Bering	20
2. Bering to Bandan	12
3. Bandan to camp	12
4. Camp to camp	10
5. Camp to camp	20
6. Camp to camp	30
7. Camp to Shus	10
8. Shus to Saliabad	33
9. Saliabad to Saribesha	30
10. Saribesha to Mud	21
11. Mud to Birjand	23
Nasrataband to Birjand . .	221

From Nasratabad to Shus the distances given are very rough, the route I took not being a regular one; but from Shus to Birjand the distances given and stages are those which I learnt at Quetta.

CHAPTER VII.

BIRJAND TO MESHED.

The usual delay—Crossing the Saman Shahi Pass—Off the road—Servants come to blows—We reach Room—Futility of trying to run a double camp—Kain—Dispute with my camelman Conveniences for travellers—On the road—Inquisitiveness of the people—Kakh—Gunabad—Dirty habits of my cook—Across a desolate plain—Pilgrims—Kherabad—News from the outside world again—Turbat-i-Haideri—A long ride—Meshed at last.

A SOJOURN of any length in Iran is like to imbue one with the stoical fatalism of its people, and it had not required a very prolonged experience of the ways and means of this distractingly apathetic country to show me the absolute futility of endeavouring to take up a position of tentative authority,—a mere travesty,—and to enable me to reply "kismet" with a certain degree of calmness and resignation whenever my arrangements were reduced to chaos, a state to which they invariably came when they were in any way dependent for accomplishment on the exasperatingly unaspiring native.

When therefore the camels, which had been promised me by the 26th or 27th of January, actually turned up on the 2nd of February, my feelings of gratitude towards the camelman for having shown such unhoped-for punctuality in keeping his appointment rose almost to a point of enthusiasm; and when further I actually

induced him by means of persuasion, flattery, bribery, and every other means I could think of, to load them up and make a start on the 4th, my satisfaction knew no bounds. An unnecessary amount of time was wasted, to be sure, in loading up the beasts; for though he had promised to be ready to leave the town at 6 A.M., we did not get clear of the city till after midday, which resulted in our camping at a village about ten miles off for the night. But still I felt that to have made a start, however small a one, was the great thing, and the prospects of reaching Meshed, which had of late begun to assume in my brain all the elusive properties of a phantom city, now became appreciably brighter.

After leaving the straggling houses on the outskirts of the town behind, we travelled in a northern direction over a flat expanse bounded by a range of mountains from which long lines of *kanat* shafts, looking for all the world like the tops of miniature volcanic craters, stretched away in various directions, carrying water to the villages which were dotted here and there over the country. Much of the land was being ploughed—the plough, a rough implement of wood, being drawn by a cow and donkey harnessed side by side, a quaint though apparently satisfactory combination; and it is possible that there are times of the year when the terrible monotony of the uniform dust colour of Birjand is broken by fields of smiling corn and the blossom of the many kinds of fruit said to grow there.

On the 5th we crossed the range in front of us by the Saman Shahi Pass (7000 feet), where snow lay deep on the ground, at the top of which I was afforded ample opportunity of ruminating on the natural disadvantages of the ungainly build of the camel, which renders all ground, with the exception of a perfectly level and dry plain, so peculiarly unsuitable to his movements, while

I looked on helplessly at the clumsy efforts of my transport animals as they slid and slithered about on the slippery surface, halting every few yards to gaze round with the aggravating expression of injured innocence with which one becomes so familiar, only to flounder on again with a protesting gurgle to the vociferous exhortations of the drivers.

Having wasted the greater part of the morning in

Crossing the Saman Shahi Pass.

seeing them safely over the worst places, I went on ahead down a gradual descent, passing here and there a small village in a sheltered hollow, and little patches of cultivated land, often enclosed by mud walls. Evening began to close in, bringing with it no signs of Room, a village at which I purposed camping for the night; and thinking I must surely be somewhere near my destination, I took the first opportunity afforded by a

small cluster of domed huts of inquiring how far it was. In reply I was informed that at present it was twelve miles, but that if I continued in my present direction it would soon be a good deal farther. This was a little disconcerting, as I had followed the only visible track; but, none the less, further questioning elicited the fact that we were off the *road* to Meshed, and should have to go several miles before we could get on to it again. Following the direction indicated by our informant, we were lucky enough to strike a fair-sized village called Sadik at seven o'clock, where, as luck would have it, there was a good caravanserai, about seven miles from Room. What had become of the camels goodness only knew, as nothing had been heard of them in the village, and by ten o'clock I gave up all hope of seeing them before day, and having dined off some native bread obtained in the village, I got hold of some straw and lay down to sleep as I was, on the floor of one of the untenanted rooms of the caravanserai. It was bitterly cold, and what with having had scarcely anything to eat, and being entirely without blankets, I did not pass a very enjoyable night.

I was roused in the morning by my cook, who broke unceremoniously in upon my slumbers, his beauty, never at the best of times of a particularly entrancing nature, greatly detracted from by an extremely sanguinary nose (!), to pour into my ears a picturesque tale of woe decorated with copious adjurations to the Prophet, the gist of which seemed to be that he had received rough treatment at the hands of Ram Pershad. The latter, on being summoned, explained that Abdul Hag had first hit him over the head with one of the *sowars'* rifles for no particular reason that he knew of, whereupon he had not altogether unnaturally retaliated by giving back as good as he got with his clenched fist.

As each swore by all he held sacred that the other was lying, and as the *sowars* whom I called in as witnesses did not seem to be able to make up their minds that either of them was speaking the truth, my temper, already rather short after the discomforts of the night, gave way, and seizing my cane I settled the matter by threatening all parties with a taste of it unless they made themselves scarce, a proceeding which had the desired effect of relieving me of their presence.

The advantage of sleeping in one's clothes is that one is spared the trouble of dressing in the morning, an advantage from a time-and-trouble-saving point of view of a similar nature being likewise derived from being without any sort of toilet accessories, so that having been thoroughly aroused by this petty exhibition of quarrelling among my servants, there was nothing to prevent me from at once taking steps to procure something in the way of breakfast. My efforts in this direction were rewarded with a greater measure of success than they had been the previous evening, for I managed to borrow a cooking-pot, and to purchase a fowl and some eggs to cook in it. This done, I sent out men to search for the camels, while I got on to the roof of the serai and scoured the country with field-glasses. About midday they hove in sight, and half-an hour later reached Sadik. It seemed that they had also lost their way and had been aimlessly wandering over the plain, a fact which will give some idea of the nature of a Persian *road*. As soon as they reached Sadik I went on, getting over the remaining distance between us and Room by evening.

I found great difficulty in getting my camelmen off in the mornings, and though I stood over them while they were loading, and kept them at it, it was ten o'clock before we got started from Room. I had had

to give up all idea of running a double camp since I had left Birjand, as the camelmen simply refused to go on ahead by night, and on this point no inducement whatever would move them. The only thing to do under the circumstances was to tramp along the live-long day with my transport, which I found more satisfactory than riding on ahead and waiting for hours for camp to come up, to say nothing of the chance of our not meeting at the end of the day, as had happened at Sadik.

In the evening we reached Kain. Judging from what I saw, I should say that a great deal of fruit must be grown here, for I marched for nearly two miles among orchards and cultivated fields enclosed by mud walls before coming to any sign of houses. When I at length came to the town itself, I found a solid-looking gateway barring entrance to the main street, supported on each side by a tower, the whole of which would seem to be a little superfluous, since the place was without walls. After proceeding through the usual alleys of a Persian town, we reached the caravanserai, a moderate example of the article, and I set to work to clean out the hovel in which I purposed passing the night. It was not much to be proud of: a small square room just high enough for me to stand in, with a single aperture to do duty for door and windows, the whole resembling an empty coal-cellar more than anything else, the mud walls and beam roof being black and begrimed with the smoke of ages.

The gateway, which I have remarked on, proved a stumbling-block to one of my camels, which refused to pass under it at any price, the result being that the camelman had to stay where he was with his camel the whole night. When I got up in the morning about seven o'clock and went out to see that

the camels were being loaded, I found everything in a state of confusion and Ralmat Khan engaged in a heated argument with the camelman. The latter, it appeared, absolutely refused to go on, and expressed his intention, in language more forcible than polite, of remaining where he was till a lame camel which he had left at Room recovered and overtook us. As I had disposed of the beast's load and no longer required it, and as, moreover, its recovery might be a matter of days, not to say weeks, it was not likely that I was going to wait for it, and producing a written agreement in which it was promised that he would take me straight to Meshed with no unnecessary delay, I told the camelman that he must *go* on immediately, and ordered him to proceed with the loading. He was, however, hopelessly and pig-headedly obstinate, and flatly refused to move. Seeing that it was useless to try and persuade him, I took matters into my own hands, and informed him that as I had paid half the hire in advance, the camels were virtually mine till I reached Meshed, and that whether he liked it or not the camels at anyrate should proceed, even if I had to load and lead them myself. I then ordered my servants to pack up the baggage. We had succeeded in loading about half the beasts, and were busy attending to the rest, when it was noticed that the loaded camels had left the serai. Running out with the *daffidar*, I saw the refractory camelman leading them away in the opposite direction. This was a little too much, and, closing with him, a scuffle ensued for the possession of the leading rein, in the heat of which he received a blow which tumbled him on to his back. I then led the recaptured camels back in triumph, and by ten o'clock started off with the whole string. The result of this amateur loading, combined with the narrowness

of the streets through which we had to pass, was that before we were clear of the town one of the camels had succeeded in getting rid of his load, and another quarter of an hour was spent in collecting rolls of bedding, camp-chairs, cooking-pots, and various other articles, and securing them once more. We were spared further mishaps, however; and when we were at last clear of the lanes of the town, it was with feelings of satisfaction that I walked along by my string of camels over the plain away from Kain.

The town had the appearance of a considerable village surrounded by trees, with one large building standing up high above the rest of the houses, which, I was informed, was a mosque. The population is, I was given to understand, about 1000;[1] but the only fact of any interest that I gleaned about the place was that it is famous for growing saffron, a valuable export, which has taken the place of silk, for which it used to be noted; and after the rather trying experiences of the morning, it was with relief rather than any other feeling that I watched its buildings and orchards become gradually less distinct, and finally vanish, as they became blended with their featureless surroundings in the dim haze of distance. Long before we reached the end of the day's march the camelman appeared upon the scene again and took his accustomed place at the head of the camels, having repented him of his misdeeds, and henceforth, though never a word was said about the fracas of the morning, we were the very best of friends.

By evening we reached the village of Asadabad, where we spent the night. From Birjand onwards, though there is nothing like the arrangements for travellers which I am given to understand exist on all

[1] According to Major Sykes, the population is about 4000.

the main routes where the system of *chapar* or post-riding is in vogue, I generally found a space with a few mud hovels devoted to the use of caravans, and though generally disgustingly dirty, I made use of them, partly to save the time wasted in pitching and striking camp, and partly because, owing to the smallness of the huts and the absence of any aperture beyond the hole that served for a door, they afforded far greater warmth than a tent, which, in the severe frosts that set in as soon as the sun went down, were miserably cold shelters. On this occasion I had to eject a cow before taking possession myself; but the offer of a few coppers to a villager soon set him sweeping out the place.

The next day our road lay over a dreary, *shora*-covered plain, where all sense of distance was annihilated; and though Dasht-i-Piaz, the village we were making for, built on the slope leading up to a range of hills at the end of the plain, appeared quite close at midday, it continued to do so in a tantalising and aggravating way while I tramped along steadily for another four hours before reaching it.

A peculiarity I noticed of the people of Dasht-i-Piaz and other villages in this neighbourhood was the fashion in head-dresses, which took the form of huge sheepskin hats in place of the more usual *paggree;* but if I noticed any peculiarity in them, they returned the compliment by finding much that was peculiar in me, judging from the extraordinary amount of interest I seemed to create at the various villages at which I stopped, and collected in crowds and stood about talking and staring, and getting very much in the way of loading and unloading the camels. I frequently tried to take a photograph of these groups of idle inquisitive individuals standing about hindering my departure; but the production of a camera was an immediate

signal for the whole crowd to press round me, putting all ideas of photography quite out of the question.

Leaving Dasht-i-Piaz at 8.30, we went up a gradual ascent into the mountains in front of us until one o'clock, when we came to a sudden and very steep descent down a defile between precipitous and in many places snow-covered mountains. The camels having been got safely down to more level ground, we followed a dry river-bed which pursued a winding course along the bottom of a tortuous ravine, and at 3 P.M. reached another steep pass over a ridge of hills. The camels were, however, able to avoid this by taking a rather longer road, and I left them to follow the level, crossing the hills myself.

From the top of the ridge Kakh was visible almost immediately below us, its houses nestling among clumps of trees at the foot of the mountain. Immediately opposite the serai, a superior place to the majority I had come across on this route, was a large building surmounted by a fine dome of enamelled bricks in yellow and light and dark blue, which I was informed was the tomb of Sultan Mohammed, younger brother of Iman Reza, the saint whose remains invest Meshed with such a degree of sanctity, and of course a resort of pilgrimage. As I passed it on entering the serai several devout worshippers were prostrating themselves to the ground before the holy threshold. Beyond this there was a high walled enclosure, presumably the fort, in the usual state of decay, and several mosques, as befitted so holy a place of pilgrimage.

The camels were tired, and I found it necessary to halt for a day, unwillingly enough, for the attractions of Kakh, whatever they might be to the devout follower of the Prophet, were to me nil, and I devoted the greater part of the day to repose. As it was a large

place, I thought there might be a post-office, and sent Ralmat Khan to make inquiries. He returned accompanied by a man who, as far as I could make out, was a public servant of some kind, from whom I gathered that though the post did go through his hands he was not allowed to open it. Being a Persian, he of course had not the slightest scruple in doing so, provided he thought it was worth his while, and when the postal *sowar* from Meshed came in, he brought the bag to me, and being careful to cut the string on the opposite side to the seal (it was no bag in the proper sense of the word, the letters being merely tied up in thick paper secured with string as any other parcel might be, and sealed in one place), shook out all the letters. Having examined them and found nothing for myself, I restored them, and being secured once more, they were despatched on their way to Birjand. There was a bazaar of sorts in the town where candles, kerosene oil, and matches represented European industries, the former bearing the mark of Belgium, while the oil of course came from Russia.

I left Kakh on the 12th, getting all the camels loaded and ready to start by 8.30 A.M., and journeyed over a level plain away from the snow-covered mountains above the town. The march to Gunabad, though supposed to be four *farsakhs*,—a *farsakh* is an elastic term, indicating a distance of from three to five miles, according to the part of the country one happens to be in,—was certainly a good deal less, and we reached the serai on the edge of the town by 3 P.M.

The houses, of which there seemed to be a good number, were scattered in a straggling line over a considerable extent of ground, and were hidden to a great extent by trees. There were the usual dilapidated city walls enclosing the bazaar, and rising above the squat-

looking houses were to be seen square towers, pierced by parallel vertical slits, to catch the air in the summer. One of these towers would distribute whatever cool air there might be to a whole clump of houses.

Having got to the end of the day's march early, I had occasion to look into the camel-trunks devoted to the belongings of the cook. I had had some experience of Asiatic cooks and their ways; but I am bound to admit that a dive into Abdul Hag's camel-trunk was a revelation. The filth was inconceivable, and such as even the old Kashmiri warrior Khada Bux, who had accompanied me in the capacity of cook during my wanderings in the Himalayas, never in his wildest dreams aspired to. Mutton, flour, unplucked fowls, ghee (clarified butter), fat, and stock were all muddled up together in a single box, though separate tins and cases had been provided for all these things; and in one box, which had originally been intended for flour, I found seventeen eggs half smashed (date of purchase unknown), a huge fid of fat in an advanced stage of decomposition, a cooked and juicy turnip and potato, the whole welded together with some semi-congealed gravy! And it was from these ingredients that my dinner was cooked! He had been a most unsatisfactory servant all along, who afforded a convincing though unpleasing proof of the truth of the proverb that "God sends meat and the devil sends cooks," and became worse as he approached the end of the journey. Often after I had been reproving him for his dirty habits, and for quarrelling with the other servants,—a favourite occupation of his,—he would rush up to me and swear by the Prophet that he would shoot himself. In spite of my repeated assurances that such a proceeding would undoubtedly be the best deed he had succeeded in accomplishing since his entry into this

RAM PERSHAD ON HIS RIDING-CAMEL.

world, he always seemed to think better of it. On one occasion I was startled by his rushing wildly up, tearing off his turban, and displaying to my astonished gaze a head of coal-black hair. On my demanding an explanation of this irregular proceeding, he clutched at his thickly growing locks and called upon his *white* hairs to bear witness to his venerable age! What the meaning of this dramatic display was I was quite unable to discover, but it is probable that he was a trifle gone in the head, as there was no doubt that he indulged in the pernicious habit of opium-eating.

After leaving Gunabad we passed during the first two or three hours through a large and smiling oasis of well-kept fields, many already green with the young shoots of corn, and flourishing villages, a pleasant change after the usual tracts of barrenness; but having left these behind, we emerged once more on to brown uncultivated plain, reaching the village of Amrani by evening.

Between Amrani and the next inhabited country stretched a sterile and inhospitable plain for a distance of eight *farsakhs*, and as my camels seldom succeeded in covering more than four or at most five *farsakhs* during the day, I found it necessary to carry water, firewood, fodder, &c., from Amrani, so that I should be able to halt for the night at an empty building which was said to exist half way.

The landscape was one such as is common in Baloochistan and Khorasan, a vast expanse of level with a vision of hills in the dim distance beyond. Overhead the sun shone from a cloudless sky; but during the morning a strong wind blew in fitful gusts, raising a whole host of sand-devils that spun in wild gyrations over the dreary waste. Mirage, too, dazzling the eye and bewildering the senses with its elusive and incessant

tremor, produced for our edification some of its most fantastic illusions, a weird sample displaying a flock of sheep floating gently about in the air with a filmy blue vapour beneath them. During the day I passed a caravan of about forty donkeys, and noticed on one or two occasions shepherds driving their sheep and goats over the plain to pick up what nourishment they could from the dry and dusty scrub that grew there. By 5 P.M. we reached the building, a large empty barn obviously devoted as much to animals as to men, so pitched my tent for the night, a thing I had not done for many days. A small party of Hazara pilgrims also spent the night here. I had met one or two of these pilgrims before, tramping wearily along the road to Meshed, and I am bound to say I could not help being struck with their implicit trust in Providence. One man I call to mind accosted me on the road before I reached Sistan, begging for a meal and a little money. Six weeks later I met the same individual close to Birjand, still tramping light-heartedly along with not so much as a coin in his pocket, his worldly goods consisting of a rug which he carried on his back. He was entirely dependent on the hospitality of the villagers he met for mere existence, yet it never so much as entered his head that he might never reach the holy city.

The following day we crossed the remainder of the plain, reaching a village called Kherabad, at the foot of hilly ground, once more, and it being only three o'clock, I ordered the camels to go on. The men of Kherabad, however, declared that there was nothing, not even water, for another four *farsakhs*, so that I had to halt. This I was not in the least surprised to find was a lie, for I had been going little more than a couple of hours the next day when I came across

a small encampment of shepherds and a well. From here another five or six hours across a dreary uninhabited waste took me to a small village, where I spent the night in a house which a villager kindly put at my disposal. Shortly before reaching this place I was met by a Turkoman *sowar* from Meshed, who had been awaiting my arrival at Turbat-i-Haideri with stores most thoughtfully sent by Colonel Temple, H.B.M. Consul-General, and letters, which were most welcome, as I had had no news from the outside world for a month. He also informed me that the *karguzar* —a Persian official—had got a house ready for me, news which did not please me so much, as I knew it would mean a certain amount of bother.

In this I was not mistaken, for on my arrival after a short march the following morning I was met by the gentleman in question, quite a young man, who guided me to the house he was putting at my disposal, and then sat down with me to tea and kalian, and the hypocritical pretence of an enjoyable conversation carried on with the aid of an inferior interpreter. As I had expected, he raised every sort of objection to my continuing my journey the next day, and ended by saying that as I was his guest I had no option, but must stay where I was for the next few days. This was of course absurd; and after thanking him for his hospitality, and assuring him of my very great appreciation of his kindness, I told him politely but firmly that as I had already been unduly delayed on my journey, I should leave Turbat the next day. Such opposition to his wishes appeared to be new to him, and he went off in a huff. After he had taken himself off I was visited by a number of people, but I found that a liberal supply of tea and kalian kept them quiet, and whenever they showed signs of verbosity, I handed

them over to Ralmat Khan. Among them was an individual who spoke Hindustani, who informed me that he had been appointed by Colonel Temple to look after Indian trade and traders, should any put in an appearance at Turbat, and on the strength of his position, I suppose, insisted on making me a present of a large tray of pomegranates. This was most unfortunate, as a whole host of others promptly followed his example, and as I particularly dislike this particular fruit, and had not sufficient cash with me to pay for many presents, I had at last to give orders that no more gifts were to be accepted. I tried to gather a little information from my Hindustani-speaking acquaintance, but was singularly unsuccessful, the only news he gave me of the Russian officers who are quartered here being that they had sent a man to watch my movements and find out as much as he could of my plans and reasons for visiting Turbat.

The *karguzar* apparently recovered his temper after he left me, and before very long I received a present from him of sugar, tea, &c. I was engaged in making arrangements to hire two or three ponies to enable me to hasten on to Meshed, and in the hurry of the moment I forgot the delicate little subterfuges which are so necessary in dealing even with servants in Persia, and handed the money for the gift straight to him. I shall never forget the picture of injured innocence which he presented as he threw up his hands in a gesture of horror at the idea of receiving money in return for a present, while he reached really sublime heights of hypocrisy when he solemnly averred that no right-minded Persian such as himself could think of accepting any return. Such farcical allegations were a little too much, and I fairly laughed in his face, an insult which he entirely forgave when Ralmat Khan

handed him the rejected coin as soon as he had got round the corner and out of my sight.

By evening I had come to an agreement with two natives of Turbat, by which they were to supply me with ponies to carry food and bedding, and to cover the remaining distance to Meshed in two days, and early the next morning I started with Ram Pershad and Ralmat Khan, leaving the rest of the servants and camels to follow as quickly as they could. The ride to Meshed was a long and exceedingly wearisome one (about eighty miles I believe), over execrable tracks which led across mountain-ridges of considerable height, covered at the summit with ice and snow. As we had no change of ponies our progress was necessarily slow, and we had been riding from early morning until dusk before we reached the village of Kaffir Killah, where I spent the night in a room of one of the houses which a villager put at my disposal for a small consideration.

The hours between dawn and noon hung heavily, as though loth to depart, while I expended what little energy I could raise in futile efforts to urge a tired pony out of a walk, as we journeyed over the terribly monotonous tracts of bleak desolation which stretched away in front of us; and when we did at length reach the summit of an eminence from which was visible the dome of the great tomb of the saintly Iman Reza, round which clustered the houses of the holy city, I think I thanked my God as devoutly as any of my excited followers who prostrated themselves to the ground in prayer at this their first glimpse of holy ground, though from not altogether similar reasons. Leaving the Mohammedans to give vent to their feelings of delirious joy at leisure, I hurried down to the plain below, where I was met by Colonel Temple, in

whose company I travelled on to the holy city, and a short time afterwards the cry of the muezzin invoking all devout believers to prayer was wafted towards me on the evening breeze as I passed beneath the gateway into the sacred city beyond.

LIST OF MARCHES FROM BIRJAND TO MESHED.

	Farsakhs.
1. Birjand * to Saki	5
2. Saki to Room	5
3. Room to Kain	6
4. Kain * to Asadabad	4
5. Asadabad to Dasht-i-Piaz	4
6. Dasht-i-Piaz to Kakh	4
7. Kakh to Gunabad	4
8. Gunabad * to Amrāni	4
9. Amrāni to Kherabad	8
10. Kherabad to Tijrood	4
11. Tijrood to Turbat-i-Haideri	4
12. Turbat-i-Haideri * to Kashak	4
13. Kashak to Shora Hissar	4
14. Shora Hissar to Robat Safaid	4
15. Robat Safaid to Kaffir Killah	5
16. Kaffir Killah to Sharifabad	6
17. Sharifabad to Tarok	5
18. Tarok to Meshed *	2
Birjand to Meshed	82

The above are the marches as given to me by a merchant in Birjand. He reckoned that the 82 *farsakhs* would be equivalent to about 290 miles. An asterisk (*) indicates a post-office.

CHAPTER VIII.

FROM MESHED TO LONDON.

The city—The British Consulate—On various forms of transport—Two Russian schemes—Farewell to my Indians—Engaging a carriage—We leave Meshed—Peculiarities of a Persian road—A comparison—Stormy weather—Road improves as it approaches the Russian frontier—Custom-house on the frontier—Askabad—Difficulty in making myself understood—The Transcaspian railway—Krasnovodsk—Baku—A slow train—Moscow—More railway journey—Brussels—The white cliffs of Dover.

I HAVE no intention of trying to give in the following pages anything like an adequate description of Meshed, —firstly, because I am not capable of doing so; and secondly, because, even if I were, there would be little use in trying to add anything to the excellent description of the place and its history to be found in Colonel Yates' 'Khurasan and Sistan.' I was only long enough in the town myself to receive a general impression of a somewhat dilapidated mud city which exercises an inexplicable fascination over dwellers in all parts of Asia, a fact which is sufficiently obvious to any one who takes the trouble to walk down the *khiábán* or main street, where he will see an example of the most extraordinary cosmopolitan crowd he is likely to come across anywhere,—"an epitome," as Curzon so aptly puts it, "of the particoloured, polyglot, many-visaged populations of the East." There is in reality very little

likely to afford interest to the European traveller, the one thing which he really might wish to see—namely, the shrine of Iman Rezar—being kept strictly closed to any unbeliever; and after he has seen the large covered-in bazaars, which, after all, do not differ much from those of any other oriental city, and spent an hour or two in visiting the carpet manufactories which exist in the town, he will probably come to the same conclusion as I did, that the sooner his impressions of the holy city are gilded over by the softening touch of memory the better.

The British Consulate is the finest building in the town, and is situated in a fair-sized garden, which, thanks to the interest taken in it by my host, is capable of producing a fine show of fruit and flowers, and the almond-trees, which were scattered here and there, were just breaking into blossom, heralding the approach of spring, when I brought my flying visit to an end. The severe cold of the winter, when the thermometer frequently falls below zero, seemed to have no bad effects on the fruit, which is brought into being by a proportionately high average of heat in the summer.

As soon as my camels arrived with the rest of my baggage, which they did three days after my own arrival, I paid them off, and saw the last of them with feelings of anything but regret. Of all the forms of transport I have had from time to time to put up with, including ponies, mules, donkeys, bullocks, yāks, and coolies, I do not think I have ever found any quite so distractingly exasperating as the camel. With every circumstance favourable the camel is good enough; but when everything is not in their favour, and the climate is too cold for them to travel by night, thus preventing one running a double camp, or the ground not as flat

as a billiard-table, the annoyances likely to be experienced are almost inconceivable.[1]

Before leaving Meshed I called on the Russian consul-general and various other officials attached to the Consulate, one and all of whom I found wearing expressions of complacent satisfaction; and well they might, for no one could deny that Russian influence here is absolutely paramount. At this time two Russian schemes were being talked of as likely to see accomplishment in the near future—one the installation in the capital of a Russian bank, and the other the construction of a railway from some point on the Transcaspian line to Meshed. Of these two schemes, the first is already a *fait accompli*, and the other has been taken in hand and bids fair to be catalogued ere long among the iron ways which Russia has already constructed in Asia.[2]

Before leaving for Transcaspia I felt bound to see that my servants were in a position to return to India; for on no pretext whatever were they allowed to cross the Russian border, and several days passed before I had managed to find ponies for them all, which I secured at an average price of a few sovereigns. They were all satisfied at last, and it was with no very great regret that, having completed my arrangements, I shook the dust of Meshed from my feet, and at 10 A.M. on March

[1] Any one who may be compelled by circumstances to travel far with camel transport will have ample opportunity of pondering on the undoubted truth of the opinion expressed by Sir T. Holdich in 'The Indian Borderland,' to the effect that "the average intelligence of the camel is not of a high order, and it is certainly a marvel if when left to himself he does not do the wrong thing." If, further, he is obliged to put up with such transport under conditions not entirely suitable, he will most assuredly come to the same conclusion as did Sir Francis Galton when he wrote in his 'Art of Travel' that "camels are only fit for a few countries, and require practised attendants; thorns and rocks lame them, hills sadly impede them, and a wet slippery soil entirely stops them."

[2] According to latest information such a line has now been completed as far as Kaltachinar.

the 1st started on the drive of 160 odd miles to Askabad and the railway.

As is to be expected in Persia, there is no regular service on the road, and no fixed fare for the journey, so that after the preliminary business of finding and securing a carriage and driver, one has perforce to go through all the dalliance of the leisurely bargaining so dear to the heart of the Oriental. At this time there luckily happened to be some carriages in the town, and having got hold of a driver of good repute, some days were spent in arguing over the fare. The final result was that he was to supply me with a carriage for myself and a *fourgon*—a sort of waggon—for my luggage for 55 tomans (£11), and further to see that I reached Askabad in five days. I sent the *fourgon* with a *daffidar* of Bengal cavalry and a Persian *ferash* to cook, both lent me by Colonel Temple, off at 7 A.M. in order to give the heavy waggon a start, and, after breakfasting comfortably at the Consulate, left myself as already mentioned at 10 A.M.

The carriage was a shabby decrepit-looking victoria drawn by four ponies harnessed abreast, the whole having the appearance of a turn-out that, in the long past, had seen better days. The appearance of these carriages, however, belies them, for they are in reality exceedingly strong, as is attested by the fact that they are capable of surviving the severe course of jolts and jars to which they are subjected between Meshed and Askabad.

Having bid farewell to my friends at the Consulate, I started off through the streets of Meshed, and for the next quarter of an hour was the passive participator in feats of driving worthy of the arena of a circus. The streets of Meshed are as narrow and tortuous as those of most other Persian towns and villages, and the way

in which the driver guided four ponies abreast along the narrow lanes in which there was only just room for them to squeeze, and round corners often at right angles, excited my highest admiration. On one occasion we did take away certain goods standing on the projecting counter of a shop, and on another spun round a donkey that was rash enough to try and pass us, in a way that astonished that usually stolid animal; but with the exception of such slight mishaps as these, we reached the city gates in safety, and once out of the town, travelled rapidly over a level plain lying between parallel ranges of mountains which ran in a direction slightly north of west. At rather over twenty miles we came to the village of Mohammedabad, where I overtook my *fourgon* and had lunch while the horses rested for a couple of hours. Twenty miles more brought us to Chinaram, at which place I spent the night in a very fair serai.

The following day we continued along the same level plain, halting about midday to give the horses a feed and rest. A long drive of about forty-eight miles in all brought us to Kuchan soon after dark, a fairly large village, with shops lighted by Russian lamps and filled with Russian goods. I have no wish to unduly decry the laudable efforts of Persia to improve herself by the making of roads and other improvements which commend themselves to the civilised mind, even when, as in the case in question, such measures are evolved under Russian pressure and with a view to Russian ends; but, to tell the plain unvarnished truth, it would take an individual capable of vast flights of imagination to recognise in the execrable track over which we had been bumped and jolted during the day anything approaching the article commonly understood by the term "road." In many places it was a foot deep in

sand, which rose up in clouds as we ploughed our way through it, and at others was so broken by ditches, holes, and ruts that for long stretches our driver preferred to steer a course over the scrub-covered but tolerably level plain. I could not help calling to mind and comparing with this wretched roadway, and the poor arrangements for travelling over it, similar roads in India, such as the road from Rawal Pindi to Kashmir, on which a journey of 200 miles is easily performed in two to three days, where fresh ponies are found at every four or five miles, and where rest-houses are built at suitable intervals, at which a comfortable room awaits the traveller and meals are provided at a few minutes' notice; or the road from Kalka to Simla, a distance of nearly sixty miles, which, though leading up a steep incline the whole way, is accomplished in eight hours; whereas here the same wretched horses have to cover the whole distance, a cook and all the accompanying paraphernalia are a necessity (unless one cares to cook one's own meals), and the distance of 160 miles occupies five days, or, under the most favourable circumstances, at least four.

On the morning of the 3rd it began to snow, and my driver for some time refused to start; but as Kuchan held out no attractions for me, and I was in no way inclined to spend a day in the cheerless serai, I at length prevailed with the only argument that I ever found of the slightest use—that they would receive no pay. A high wind blew with perverse persistency straight in our faces, and I am bound to admit that the day's drive was one of the most unpleasant that I have ever experienced, for in addition to the cold, which was sufficiently displeasing, I had the further discomfort of being soaked with the driving snow, which the hood of the victoria was quite powerless to keep out. Before

long we turned into the mountains on the north, and so slow did our progress become that we were unable to reach Iman Kuli, where there was said to be a good serai, but had to pass the night at a small village with an inferior serai called Daulet Thana.

The road from Daulet Thana to Iman Kuli is enough to make a cat laugh, and the absurdity of considering it in the light of a road at all must be sufficiently evident to any one who has undergone the discomforts entailed by a journey over it. The wheels were frequently buried up to the axles in a perfect Slough of Despond, and some idea of the state of the road may be gained when I mention that two of the ponies fell down on separate occasions, though we were only proceeding at a walk at the time; indeed, on this section of the journey we were unable to go out of a walk for distances of several miles at a stretch, and our progress during the day was funereal, with a result that we again failed to reach the proper stage of Sham Khal, and were reduced to spending another night in a small village. Judging from a comment made by Curzon on a sentence in a consular report in which this route is described as an "excellent macadamised road," it would appear that little change either for the better or the worse has taken place in its condition since it came into being ten years ago, and long before the termination of my journey over it I had painfully numerous opportunities of pondering over the striking appositeness of the note in which he says, "I think this word is a misnomer, for I am convinced that were the original Macadam to be raised from the dead and dropped down on the Askabad-Meshed road, he would stand aghast at such a prostitution of his respectable name."

The next morning we got started soon after seven o'clock. As we approached the Russian frontier the

scenery became grander and more rugged, and the mountains lost the dead-looking appearance which had been the most noticeable feature of all the ranges that I had hitherto seen in Persia, precipitous rocks beneath whose shelter hardy cedars grew being varied by steep grass-covered slopes. The road, too, improved in proportion, and as it wound backwards and forwards up a steep mountain-side, developed into a very fair specimen of a mountain thoroughfare, displaying a considerable amount of engineering skill in its construction. After passing the village of Durbadam, at which place the future railway from Askabad to Meshed is, I believe, to join the present road,—a deviation to the east of the existing route, between this place and the Transcaspian railway, by Kaltachinar, being necessary owing to the nature of the ground,—I reached Sham Khal, a large and commodious serai, at 11.30, and here rested a short time before proceeding to the Russian frontier and custom station, four miles distant. Here, too, I had to leave the *daffidar*, Indians being prohibited from crossing the frontier into Russian territory. The jealous care with which Russia guards her possessions in this part of the world from the inquisitive eye of the ubiquitous Briton is almost childish. When I proposed taking my Indian servant with me I was informed that such a proceeding could not be entertained for a moment, and it was only after all sorts of officials in London and St Petersburg had had a say in the matter—including, I believe, the Russian Minister for War—that I received permission to travel by the Transcaspian railway myself; and even when this permission was at last obtained, it was qualified by a clause prohibiting me from travelling on the Murghab branch (which, however, was perhaps natural), and also from stopping at Bokhara (for which I could

discover no reason whatsoever). However, one should be thankful for small mercies, I suppose, and my thanks are due to those who obtained leave for me to travel on the line at all.

About three miles from Sham Khal we came to the Persian customs, which were passed without difficulty, and a mile farther on entered Russian territory, where the way was barred by the Russian station. The road here passes through a walled enclosure, at the gates of which a sentry was doing duty in a desultory sort of fashion, sitting lolling against the wall as I passed in with rifle and bayonet under his arm; and inside, where we pulled up to have the luggage inspected, a few men in uniform of a kind were to be seen lounging about. Several officers arrayed in long blue frock-coats with brass buttons appeared when my boxes were opened for inspection, who looked on while another individual, whom I took to be a non-commissioned officer, probed to the bottom in search of contraband. Everything had to be opened, even to my despatch-box and helmet-case; but nothing objectionable being found, I was allowed to close up my trunks and, after having had my passport vised, to proceed on my way.

We very soon got into a thick white fog, and the scenery, which up to now had been possessed of a certain grandeur, became shrouded in obscurity; but from the rapid descent it was obvious that we were hastening down the far side of the mountain-range. At one place a camel had most inopportunely selected the very narrowest and steepest bit of the road as a fitting place to pass his last moments in this world, and almost entirely blocked it, as he lay stretched at full length across it; but this obstruction once passed, we drove on without further delays, and soon after 6 P.M. the lights of Askabad became visible, casting a

dull red glow through the murky atmosphere, and as I alighted at the entrance of the Grand Hotel I was thankful enough to think that my long drive was at last over, and that I was once more in touch with civilisation.

Having entered the hotel, whose designation of "Grand" is a trifle misleading, I encountered two or three individuals, one after the other, of the genus hall-porter, who addressed me volubly in what was to me incoherent gibberish. Realising that I was not taking in one word of what they appeared to be so anxious to tell me, they soon desisted, one of them vanishing through folding-doors to return shortly afterwards with a gentleman whom I took to be the proprietor. He opened fire with "Sprechen sie deutsch?" which I unfortunately did not, and he in his turn disappeared. All this time I was standing in the hall of the hotel trying to devise some means of making myself understood, and was beginning to experience a lost and helpless feeling at finding myself at large and alone among people who understood no word of any language I could speak, and of whose lingo I knew nothing, when the gentleman whom I had taken to be the proprietor returned in company with an individual bearing the word professor writ large all over him, from his uncut hair and unkempt beard to his long shiny black coat, ill-tied tie, and elastic-sided boots. I at once addressed him in French, guessing that a medium had at last been discovered by means of which I could make known my wish for food and lodging for the night. His answer, from which I gathered that though he could speak a little French, it was very little and far from good, was somewhat disappointing, especially when he suggested that we should first try Latin as a medium of conversation,

falling back upon French as a last resort. I hastened to explain to him as best I could that we might omit the formality of attempting a conversation in Latin and get on at once to the French, since his French, though quaint and mixed with much Russian, was at anyrate to a certain extent understandable, a quality which I felt could hardly be claimed for my Latin, dragged on the spur of the moment from the limbo of the long-forgotten. As a result of our united efforts the proprietor was at length made to understand that I required a room for the night, and wished above all for some food as soon as I could have it; and the *fourgon* with my Persian servant turning up at the moment, I turned in, leaving him to make arrangements for the morning.

The word Askabad signifies, I believe, "the abode of love," a title the appropriateness of which in no way struck me as I splashed through its muddy streets, lined with prosaic-looking Russian houses, on my way to the station on the 6th; and my feelings were certainly not those of regret as from the window of a second-class carriage (there are no first-class carriages except one, in the form of a saloon, retained for the use of the powers that be in Transcaspia) I watched it grow indistinct and finally vanish as we steamed rapidly west.

To be travelling once more by the aid of steam, in all the comfort and luxury afforded by the trains of to-day, including an excellent restaurant car, with the possibility of covering in twenty-four hours a distance that would have taken, travelling as I had been for the last few months, more than as many days, was far from unpleasant; and though, owing to the greater part of the journey being got through by night,—we left Askabad at 3 P.M. and reached Krasnovodsk at 9 A.M.,

—I missed seeing what places of interest there are, such as Geok Tepe, the scene of Skobeleff's great victory over, or rather slaughter of, the Tekke Turkomans, I saw about as much of the scenery as I wanted to, consisting as it does of the line of the Kopet Dagh Mountains on one side, and on the other of an absolute level, stretching away far as the eye can see, and losing itself in the vast inhospitable wastes of the Kara Kum desert.

As far as comfort goes, the second-class carriages on General Annenkoff's railway leave nothing to be desired, differing little from the first-class carriages one comes across on other Russian railways, and the dinner *à la carte* provided in the restaurant car is as good as any one could wish, though I confess to having felt rather at a loss when a *menu*, written of course in the Russian character, was handed to me from which to order my dinner. As luck would have it, a French gentleman and his wife, who had been residents for eight years in Bokhara, were on their way to "La belle France," and helped me out of my difficulty by interpreting for me.

At 9 A.M. on the 7th we steamed into Krasnovodsk, which, owing to its greater depth of water, superseded the original terminus of the line—Uzun Ada—some years ago, lengthening somewhat the rail, but shortening the passage of the Caspian. The shipping in the harbour and the irregular buildings which have sprung up as the natural result of its having become the terminus of the railway, with their background of rugged mountains, present a scene possessed of a certain picturesqueness; but the three hours which elapse before the departure of the boat are more than sufficient in which to exhaust the beauties of the place, and would, I should think, under less favourable

weather conditions than I was blessed with, prove exceedingly irksome. As it was, the sun shone forth from a cloudless sky, and when we at last got under way soon after midday, it was to steam over the smooth and untroubled waters of the inland sea, in which was to be found no suggestion of the violent and turbulent passions of which it is only too capable.

A passage of twenty hours brought us to Baku, whose prosperity was depicted by its lofty houses and large commodious shops, its broad streets and display of modern conveniences. No room was to be had at the hotel, so my stay in this city, whose *raison d'être* is oil, was reduced to a few hours, and at 11 A.M. I left by rail for Moscow. Outside the station long lines of huge iron cylinders on wheels were occupied in bearing away from Baku the tons of petroleum which is its life-blood; and all round were to be seen odd buildings resembling gasometers, and tall chimneys, connected with the all-absorbing industry of the place.

I was not very long in discovering that I was in a very slow train, and for the next four days and nights —ninety-eight hours, to be exact—we crawled over the intensely uninteresting flats which lie between the Caspian and Moscow. As far as Petrovsk the line follows the western shore of the Caspian, after which it turns north-west as far as Rostoff, on the northernmost point of the Sea of Azoff, running parallel with the extremity of the Caucasus Mountains. Vladikavkass, which we reached about nine o'clock on the second morning, is the point at which the military road from Tiflis on the Batoum-Baku railway joins the line, after passing over the Caucasus by the famous Pass of Dariel, and is situated beneath fine mountain-peaks, at this time deep in snow. At Rostoff, which we reached on the morning of the 10th, I had to change, and from

here on the whole country, which is intensely flat and ugly, was under snow, the straw-encased water-pipes and huge icicles which hung from the roofs and other parts of the stations showing that the iron grip of winter was still heavy in the land. Nevertheless the atmosphere in the carriages was hot and stuffy, for the windows were all double and, as far as I could make out, hermetically sealed, while a large stove in each waggon was kept going night and day. Our monotonous progress continued through the same forlorn country until one o'clock on the 12th, when we reached Moscow, where I rested for two days beneath the hospitable roof of the Slaviensky Bazaar Hotel.

Of course I rushed through the sights of the famous old-world capital,—the second largest city in Europe, by the way,—most of which are to be found within the ancient walls of the Kremlin; the chief objects of interest outside being the old house of the Romanoffs, the modern cathedral, the cathedral of Saint Basil the beatified, and the museums and picture-galleries. Inside the ancient walls of the Kremlin are the ancient and modern palaces, the arsenal, the senate, several churches and monasteries, the treasury, and a magnificent belfry, at the foot of which stands the huge bell, far famed as the biggest bell in the world. But I have no ambition to take upon myself the duties of a guide-book, many of which no doubt exist, from which one may learn how the architect of the cathedral of St Basil had his eyes put out immediately it was finished by order of the Czar Ivan the Terrible, that a splinter and nail from the true cross are to be seen in the cathedral of the Assumption, that the Czars of All the Russias go through a coronation ceremony in the same building, and a whole host of similar information upon various subjects connected with the town and its

history; and on the afternoon of the 14th I found myself once more ensconced in the corner seat of a railway carriage.

For the rest there is little to tell. A continuous journey from Moscow to Brussels affords one ample opportunity of objurgating the leisureliness of trains in Russia, of admiring the speed and punctuality of trains in Germany, of restraining temper at the fussiness of railway officials in Belgium, and of reviling the cussedness of things in general which necessitate the crossing of various frontiers at objectionably late hours of the night, or at still more objectionably early hours of the morning, each of which furnishes officialdom with an excuse for rousing the weary traveller from his hard-earned slumbers to inspect his passport or to rummage ruthlessly through his baggage. A satiety of unbroken travelling induced me to halt a day at Brussels, where I came in for the carnival of *la mi-carême*; but on the afternoon of March the 20th I found myself once again on board a boat, straining my eyes for a glimpse of the white cliffs of Dover, which, as they gradually became visible, looming through a mist and steady drizzle, assumed for me a beauty which I am quite certain they never in reality possessed. It was more than two years since I had seen them, and as I steamed into the great metropolis a little later, I felt that now my wanderings were indeed at an end, and that the day which I had so often looked upon in fancy from my tents in a desert land was no longer a thing of the future, but was actually at hand.

PERSIA AFGHANISTAN AND BELUCHISTAN

SHOWING

LORD RONALDSHAY'S ROUTE

Scale 1 : 3,810000 or 60 English Miles to 1 Inch.

Reproduced by kind permission of the Royal Geographical Society from Map compiled under the supervision of the Hon. G. Curzon, M.P., 1891.

Author's Route

The many indistinct blue Marks on these sheets are those of posts recently erected on the frontiers and have not appeared in print under the direction of the Author.

CASPIAN SEA

At least below the level of the Black Sea.

TRANSCAUCASIA

TRANSCASPIAN TERRITORY

RUSSIA

PERSIA

AFGHANISTAN

BELUCHISTAN

ARABIA

GULF OF OMAN

ARABIAN SEA

Boundaries generally defined and demarcated
Boundaries imperfectly defined
Unexplored Boundaries
Indo-European overland and submarine Telegraph lines
Railways

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